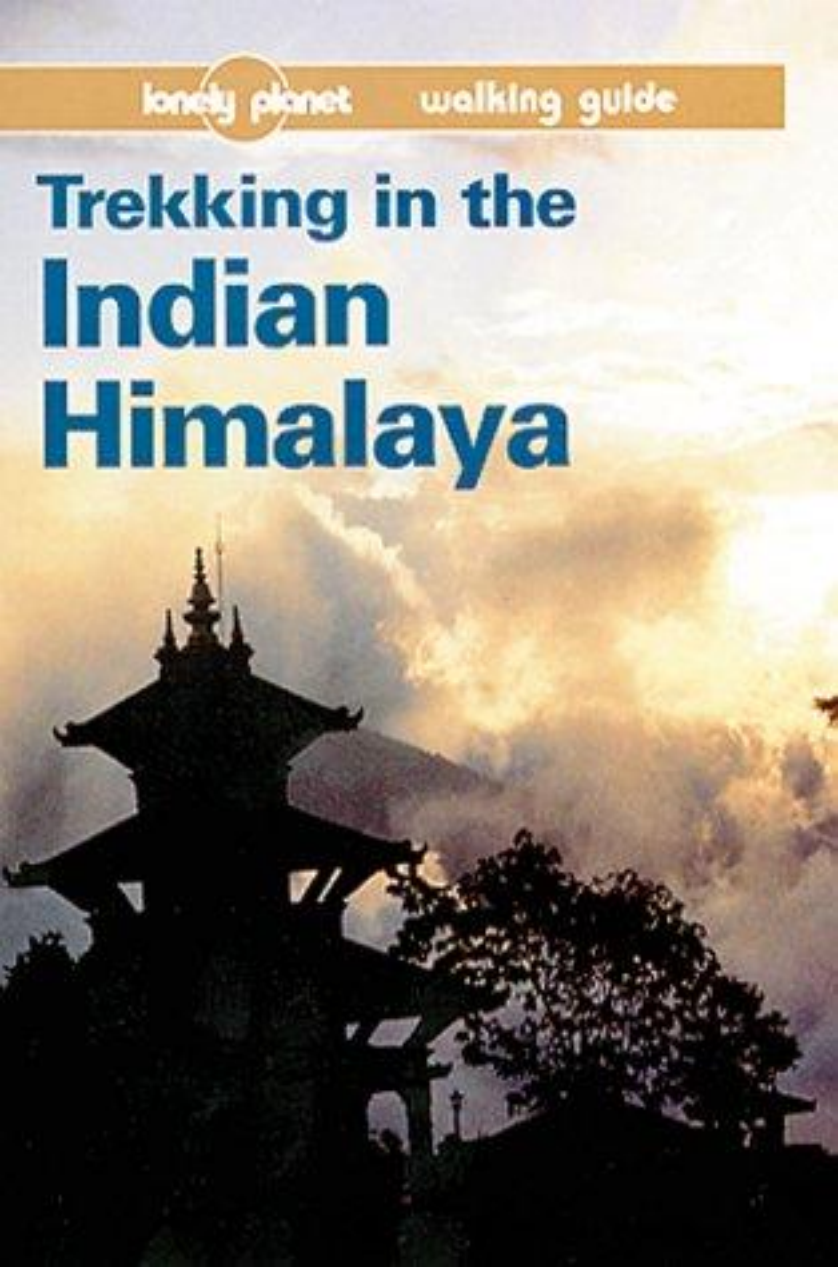
lonely planet walking guide

Trekking in the Indian Himalaya



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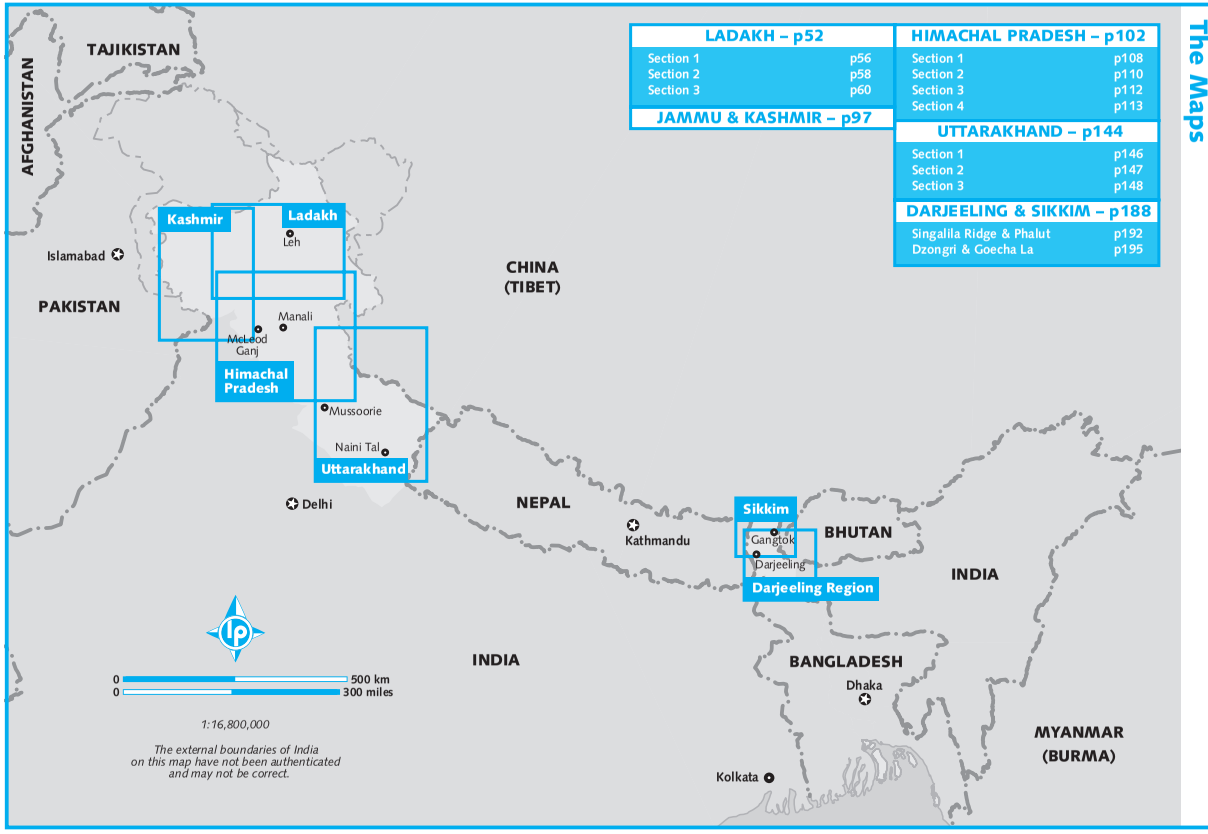

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Route Descriptions

This book contains 30 route descriptions ranging from four-day introductory treks to demanding traverses up to 11 days, plus suggestions for other treks, side trips and alternative routes. Each trek description has a brief introduction outlining the natural and cultural features you may encounter, plus information to help you plan your trek – transport options, level of difficulty, time frame and any permits required.

The treks include information on campsites and lodges and places where you can obtain water and supplies.

TIMES & DISTANCES

These are provided only as a guide. Times are based on actual walking time and do not include stops for snacks, taking photographs, rests or side trips. Be sure to factor these in when planning your trek.

In most cases, the daily stages are flexible and can be varied. It is important to recognise that short stages are sometimes recommended in order to acclimatise in mountain areas or because there are interesting features to explore en route.

Distances are provided but should be read in conjunction with altitudes. Anticipate covering up to 5 or 6km on a good undulating trail, around 4km on an average trail down, to 2 to 3km on a high pass crossing.

Significant elevation changes can make a greater difference to your walking time than lateral distance. On average a trekker will ascend around 300m per hour, less at altitudes over 4000m.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Grading systems are always arbitrary. However, having an indication of the grade may help you choose between treks. Our authors use the following grading guidelines:

Easy – a trek on flat terrain or with minor elevation changes usually over short distances on well-travelled routes with no navigational difficulties.
Moderate – a trek with challenging terrain, often involving longer distances and steep climbs.
Demanding – a trek with long daily distances and difficult terrain with significant elevation changes; may involve challenging route-finding and high-altitude or glacier travel.

TRUE LEFT & TRUE RIGHT

The terms 'true left' and 'true right', used to describe the bank of a stream or river, sometimes throw readers. The 'true left bank' simply means the left bank, as you look downstream.

Planning

The Indian Himalaya offers superb trekking possibilities. It is undoubtedly one of the most spectacular and impressive mountain ranges in the world. Compared to Nepal, the region hosts a small number of trekkers each year, but there is a steady, growing interest. In fact, they're finding a choice of treks that are as demanding and rewarding as those in the Everest or Annapurna regions.

To fully appreciate the beauty of the Indian Himalaya, there is no substitute for trekking. This unforgettable experience brings you in direct contact with the country and its people, and helps to foster an appreciation of the mountain environments.

It is essential that you select a trek suitable to your interests and ability. Taking note of the grading for each trek is imperative to ensure that your trek lives up to expectations.

HISTORY OF TREKKING

While pilgrims, armies and traders had for many centuries explored the Himalaya, organised trekking was closely associated with the pursuit of hunting for game that gained popularity in India in the later part of the 19th century. By the turn of the 20th century it was well under way. It was not uncommon for the British to undertake a trek from Srinagar to Leh as part of their annual leave. Agencies were established in Srinagar and Shimla to specialise in sport-related activities – hunting, fishing and trekking. A large retinue of porters would carry huge canvas tents and collapsible string beds.

In 1933 Ernest Neve revised the 15th edition of *The Tourist's Guide to Kashmir, Ladakh & Skardo* to reflect the increasing interest in travelling to higher and more remote valleys. Arrangements out of Kashmir could be left to Cockburn's Agency or to a houseboat family and, judging by the reports retained by some houseboat families, a trusted guide and a reliable cook were the most valuable assets to any trekking party. Crossing huge distances was no longer deemed to be extraordinary. Consider the case of Robert Fleming, who trekked for seven months from Peking to Kashmir and received not so much as a nod of acknowledgment from the reservations clerk when he finally checked into Nedou's Hotel in September 1935.

However, not all forays into the mountains were conducted on such a vast scale. In the 1930s a more modest style of exploration and climbing evolved in the Himalaya, typified by Eric Shipton, HW Tilman and Frank Smythe. Their expeditions in the Garhwal Himalaya were typified by travelling light, without complicated logistics, and often in the company of just a climbing Sherpa or two.

Following Indian Independence in 1947, the nature of trekking the high and remote Himalayan valleys was restructured to accommodate the political changes. For instance, the India/Pakistan partition meant it was no longer possible to trek from Kashmir to Baltistan. To the north, much of India's border with China was restricted. The war in 1962 led to the enforcement of Inner Line restrictions (the restricted areas close to India's sensitive border regions with Pakistan and China) in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh (at that time part of the Punjab hill states), Uttar Pradesh and Sikkim.

Regions such as Kashmir and the Kullu Valley attracted trekkers and climbers in the 1950s and 1960s. At the time Ladakh was off limits while the Pir Panjal dividing the Kullu Valley and Lahaul was as far as one could trek in Himachal. In Uttarakhand similar restrictions applied and only a few of the classic treks could be undertaken without Inner Line permits.

The gradual lifting of restrictions in 1974 allowed trekkers to visit Ladakh, Zanskar and Lahaul while permits were no longer necessary to trek in many of the northern regions of Uttarakhand. In 1992 the regions of Kinnaur, Spiti and the Johar Valley in Uttarakhand were opened up for trekking. More remote trekking areas close to India's border regions may be possible in the future.

In the space of a week or two, you may trek through Hindu settlements, explore isolated Buddhist monasteries, camp beside shepherd encampments or visit traditional Islamic villages. On a typical trek, you might traverse the Great Himalaya Range and appreciate the sheer geographic diversity – from the verdant, forested valleys and wildflower meadows to rugged Trans-Himalaya. While crossing the passes it is also encouraging to remember the many pilgrims, traders and armies who have followed these trails – their journeys reflect the rich cultural history of the region. Combine this with the wildlife and forests – and the many snow-capped peaks towering above 7000m – and you have all the ingredients of a highly rewarding trek.

A constant theme throughout this guide is that trekking has its rewards and responsibilities. In recognising that the Himalaya is not just a vast adventure playground, we must aim to minimise our impact on both the environment and the local culture.

Over the past two decades parts of the Indian Himalaya have been beset by political problems. It is hoped that future editions may again include a comprehensive guide to trekking in Kashmir, however, for now we must be content with the many attractive alternatives in the regions of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Darjeeling and Sikkim.

We offer a wealth of suggestions to help make your adventure a reality: general knowledge about the Indian Himalaya; Transport (p217) advice for getting to the region and the trailhead; tips for Health & Safety (p229) on the trail; a Language guide (p243); plus a special Clothing & Equipment section (p223) so you're well prepared before you leave home.

In each trek chapter, we introduce the region with a description of its geographical and historical features, and a guide to the wildlife. For each trek, we detail the best season to go, where to buy supplies and the accommodation en route. We also recommend local trekking agencies and give advice on hiring porters and packhorses. Finally, a day-by-day trek description is complemented by accurate trekking maps based on the author's experience.

The hard part is then up to you – choosing the best trek to suit your interests, and the time and funds that you have available. In a region so rich in culture and natural beauty, this is bound to be a challenge.

WHEN TO TREK

The trekking season in the Indian Himalaya extends from May until October. In May and June anticipate warm daytime temperatures although there will be more challenging options as higher elevations and passes over 4000m are likely to be still under snow. May and June is also the peak domestic tourist season when accommodation before and after the trek will be at a premium. On the more popular trails you may encounter large groups of Indian students savouring their first experience of the mountains.

The monsoon rains in July and August put a damper on most trekking ambitions south of the main Himalaya Range. With few exceptions it is advisable to head north to the region of Zanskar and Ladakh that are outside the influence of the monsoon. However, the monsoon has its own delights. The rainfall rarely lasts for more than a few hours a day and the occasional view of the peaks and wildflowers in full bloom may more than compensate for the effort of forging a path along the muddy trails. Autumn – from the middle of September until the end of October brings fine and settled conditions. This is an ideal time to trek in Kashmir, Himachal, Uttarakhand and Darjeeling and Sikkim. The first of the winter snows normally occurs in late October marking the end of the trekking season for all but the most intrepid trekkers.

See Climate (p206) for more information on weather in the Indian Himalaya

COSTS & MONEY

HOW MUCH?

Campsite
Rs 100/US$2.50

Room in lodge
Rs 300/US$7.50

Meal in teashop on trek
Rs 100/US$2.50

Soft drink Rs 30/US$0.75

Chocolate bar
Rs 50/US$1.25

If you are making your own arrangements make a few conservative calculations (the hiring of porters or mules; provisions; local transportation and miscellaneous extras). Then double it. India's high rate of inflation needs to also be taken into account as well as so many other expenses that always seem to be overlooked on the initial budget. If making your own arrangements, allow at least Rs 1000 to Rs 1600 (US$25/US$40) per day per person. If making your arrangements through a local agent then budget for Rs 2000/US$50 per day per person.

Get out of Delhi as soon as you can. Even the budget hotels are relatively expensive and dreary; Rs 400 (US$10) for a very basic room. For transport to the foothills budget at least for a tourist bus, typically Rs 400 to Rs 600 (US$10/15) a seat. If flying then try making an advance booking on the web or pay around US$250 for a regular one-way fare from Delhi to Leh. The most convenient way to get to your trekking-off point is by local jeep or taxi Rs 1000 (US$25). Buses are considerably cheaper; Rs 50 (US$1.25) but can take all day to get there.

Hotel costs at the hill resorts vary greatly. In the high season (May and June) budget for around Rs 700 (US$17.50) a room upwards. However the tariffs are far less for the rest of the season. A more comfortable hotel will set you back around RD 2000/US$50 per night, while for meals allow Rs 150 (US$3.75) upwards. The occasional beer will double the bill.

Tipping & Bargaining

Tipping is the custom in India, so you should budget for tips to room staff and helpers who take you around the market, not to mention the host of other people forever coming out of the woodwork to help. See Guides & Porters (p209) for advice on tipping after a trek.

Bargaining is also an integral part of Indian culture. Where there are no fixed prices, the only way to determine the price is to come to a negotiated agreement, which can involve hours of haggling. This may include bargaining over the cost of a trek, porters, transport and other matters such as the number of trek stages. Don't give up or get upset – remember that you will often lose respect if you don't bargain hard. Before bargaining try to get a good idea of the fair price, as once you agree on a price you must stick to it.

If making your own arrangements it is also crucial to ensure that you have sufficient cash to pay at the end of the trek. Check out ATM and cash facilities before you head off. For further details check the information box in the gateway town.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

Spare sunhat, water bottle and bootlaces

Comfortable pair of walking boots

A yearning for rice, dhal and curried vegetables

An abundance of patience

A ski pole for those many ascents and descents

BACKGROUND READING

While there is no shortage of travel guides and mountaineering books on the Indian Himalaya, there is by no means an abundance of trekking narratives.

Across the Top by Sorrell Wilby includes a description of an extended trek from Ladakh through Himachal to Uttarakhand before the author continued through Nepal to Bhutan and the restricted region of Arunchal Pradesh.

A Summer Ramble in the Himalaya by Anonymous is typical of the 19th-century tomes. You cannot but admire the character of the rambler who sets off for months at a time living off the land and ready to lead his team of porters over high passes with nothing more than a boiled egg and a tot of rum.

ORGANISED TREKS

If time is at a premium and you have not been to the Himalaya before then check out some of the established operators listed below.

TREK OPERATORS INDIA

An initial point of reference is the **Adventure Tour Operators Association of India** (www.atoal.com), which focuses on the professional development of adventure sports, including trekking. The following members are based in Delhi; other recommended members are listed in the trekking chapters.

Ibex Expeditions (☎ 011 2646 0244; www.ibexexpeditions.com)

Rimo Expeditions (☎ 012 4280 6027; www.rimoexpeditions.com)

Sea & Sky Travel (☎ 011 2668 1027; www.seaandskytravel.com)

Shikar Travels (☎ 011 4152 3666; www.shikar.com)

Snow Leopard Adventures (☎ 011 2689 1473; www.snowleopardadventures.com)

World Expeditions (India) (☎ 011 4164 9358; www.worldexpeditionsindia.com)

TREK OPERATORS ABROAD

The following adventure travel companies operate Himalayan programs including treks in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim, and some have been in the business well over 30 years. Many of them will arrange your flight as a part of the package.

Australia & New Zealand

Peregrine Adventures (☎ 03 8601 4333; www.peregrine.com) has offices around Australia.

The Trekking Company (☎ 02 6257 6494; www.trekking.com.au) based in Canberra.

World Expeditions (in Australia ☎ 02 9279 0188, in NZ 09 365 4161 www.worldexpeditions.com); have offices around Australia and in New Zealand.

UK

Exodus (☎ 0870 240 5550; www.exodus.co.uk)

Explore Worldwide (☎ 0870 333 4001; www.exploreworldwide.co.uk)

High Places (☎ 0845 257 7500; www.highplaces.co.uk)

KE Adventure Travel (☎ 017687 73966; www.keadventure.com)

Mountain Kingdoms (☎ 01453 844400; www.himalayankingdoms.com)

World Expeditions (☎ 020 8545 9030; www.worldexpeditions.com)

USA

Adventure Center (☎ 800 228 8747; www.adventurecenter.com)

Geographic Expeditions (☎ 800 777 8183; www.geoex.com)

Himalayan High Treks (☎ 800.455.8735; www.himalayanhightreks.com)

Journeys (☎ 800 255 8735; www.journeys.travel)

Mountain Travel Sobek (☎ 888 831 7526; www.mtsobek.com)

Snow Lion Expeditions (☎ 800 525 8735; www.snowline.com)

Canada

Worldwide Quest (☎ 800 387 1483; www.worldwidequest.com)

World Expeditions (☎ 800 567 2216; www.worldexpeditions.ca)

Nanda Devi by Eric Shipton details Shipton and Tillman's forays in the 1930s, typified by their lightweight approach conducted in true expeditionary style. Both mountaineers savoured the thought of crossing high and unchartered passes or exploring seemingly impenetrable gorges that were still blanks on the map.

Peaks and Lamas by Marco Pallis describes the author's peregrinations in Sikkim and Ladakh in the 1930s.

Meeting the Mountains and *In the Untravelled Himalaya* by Harsih Kapadia are two of the many volumes by a renowned authority on the Indian Himalaya.

TOP THREES – TREK TO A THEME

One of the bonuses of trekking in the Indian Himalaya is that they appeal to a wide variety of interests. Whatever your interest, most itineraries include something from each of these themes, which will no doubt enhance your experience.

ANCIENT CULTURES & THE PILGRIM WAY

Markha Valley (p65) The most popular trek in Ladakh includes time to appreciate ancient gompas, *mani* walls and chortens as well as whitewashed settlements reflecting the regions' abiding Buddhist culture.

Source of the Ganges (p162) An introductory trek followed by Hindu pilgrims and families to the sacred source of the Ganges at Gaumukh beneath the towering peaks of the Garhwal Himalaya.

Mani Mahesh Kailas (p136) The trek out of Brahmaur includes the opportunity to join the main pilgrimage in August when thousands of Hindu pilgrims ascend to the base of the sacred peak of Mani Mahesh Kailas.

MOUNTAIN PANORAMAS

Kuari Pass (p169) For spectacular views of Nanda Devi and a host of 7000m snow-capped peaks that extend to the borderlands of Tibet.

Singalila Ridge & Phalut (p193) This trek out of Darjeeling includes magnificent views of Khangchenzonga, the world's third-highest peak as well as glimpses of Everest, Lhotse and Makalu.

Singge La & Lamayuru (p77) A challenging traverse of Ladakh affords unrivalled views of the jagged peaks and countless ridges that form the Zanskar Range.

WILDFLOWERS

Hem Kund & Valley of the Flowers (p167) Includes a trek to the secluded Bhyundar Valley famed for its wildflowers amid high snow-capped peaks in the Garhwal Himalaya.

Harimukh Alpine Lakes Trek (p101) Arguably the best trek in Kashmir, which extends across meadows carpeted with wildflowers amid alpine lakes and granite peaks.

Dzongri & Goecha La (p196) In Sikkim ascend trails leading through rhododendron forests in May and appreciate the finest array of blooms in the Himalaya.

HIGH ALTITUDE & REMOTE CHALLENGES

Remote Zanskar (p81) Includes nearly a week forging a trail across high passes and through deep gorges in a magnificent wilderness region.

Pin Parvati Pass & Spiti (p126) In Himachal, traverse the Himalaya Range to the trans-Himalayan region of Spiti.

Milam Glacier & Nanda Devi (p179) Combine a trek to the Milam Glacier in the Kumaon Himalaya with optional forays to the Nanda Devi (East) Base Camp and beyond as well as extending the itinerary to the remote Ralam Valley.

Wild Places & Wild Hearts – Nomads of the Himalaya by Allen Smutylo is a wonderfully written and illustrated account of the Khampa nomads in western Ladakh.

Where Men and Mountains Meet by John Keay is a classic that outlines the history of some of the colourful characters who contributed to the exploration of the Western Himalaya in the 19th century.

A Long walk in the Himalaya by Garry Weare is a plug for the author's five-month trek from the sacred source of the Ganges to Kashmir. A trek that traverses over 20 passes in the vicinity of 5000m in the company of his trusted guides and crew.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Check out these websites for specific advice about trekking and travel in India:

Himalayan Club (www.himalayanclub.com) features club activities and members' reports on trekking and climbing in the Himalaya.

Indian Mountaineering Foundation (www.indmount.org) details trekking and mountaineering regulations in India, plus up-to-date conservation issues.

Jammu and Kashmir Government (www.jammukashmir.nic.in) includes sections on Ladakh and current trekking regulations.

Welcome to Himachal Pradesh (www.hptdc.com) includes general information on travelling to the Indian states and a section on Himachal Pradesh's national parks and sanctuaries.

Welcome to India (www.tourindia.com) is the official Department of Tourism site, with links to areas throughout the country.

Environment

THE LAND

The Himalaya is one of the youngest mountain ranges on earth. It is also one of the most complex. It is not one vast unbroken chain but a series of ranges culminating in the 8000m peaks that form the Great Himalaya Range. While the Great Himalaya Range is comparatively easy to identify across Eastern Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan it is far more complex in the West Himalaya. Even today, with the advent of satellite pictures and state-of-the-art ordnance maps, it is difficult to appreciate the form and extent of some of the West Himalaya. When taking a flight from Delhi to Leh these ranges look like a giant layer cake, covered in deep snow to the crest of the Great Himalaya and then becoming increasingly drier as the flight heads north towards Leh and the Indus Valley. Where one range finishes and another begins is difficult to determine. Indeed, there are eight different ranges – the Siwalik, the Dhaula Dhar, the Pir Panjal, the Great Himalaya, the Zanskar, Stok and Ladakh Ranges and the East Karakoram – that are regularly traversed in many of the treks described in this book.

RESPONSIBLE TREKKING

Over the past 30 years the impact of trekking on the environment has become increasingly apparent. Campsites are displaying all the signs of overuse, trees are lopped for campfires and fuel for porters, while litter is scattered along many of the popular trails. If trekking is to become sustainable, trekkers must accept responsibility for their actions rather than placing the responsibility on the local agent or crew. It is necessary to set an example. When you arrive at a campsite begin by clearing up any garbage and filling in toilet pits and tent trenches that have been left by previous groups. This will impress the crew and illustrate a genuine concern for their environment.

Rubbish Clean up the camp on your arrival. Ensure that all non-biodegradable items are carried out. Take reusable containers. Ensure that you bring a few additional kitbags so that bottles, tin cans and plastic items can be easily packed after use. Provide an incentive (a tip in most cases) to ensure the crew carry the kitbags back to the trailhead. Try also to limit the purchase of plastic bottles containing mineral water and soft drinks as that can also have a devastating impact on the environment.

Human waste disposal Contamination of water sources by human faeces can lead to the transmission of hepatitis, typhoid and intestinal parasites such as Giardia. Dig toilet trenches or pitch the toilet tent well away from watercourses. Burn all toilet paper and ensure all faeces are buried while trekking during the day.

Camping trails The steepness of the Himalayan hillsides make them particularly vulnerable to erosion. Do not destroy saplings or undergrowth. Stick to existing tracks and avoid shortcuts. Do not dig unnecessary trenches around tents.

Washing Don't use detergents or toothpaste near watercourses. Wash all clothes and equipment in biodegradable soap in a bucket well away from streams or rivers.

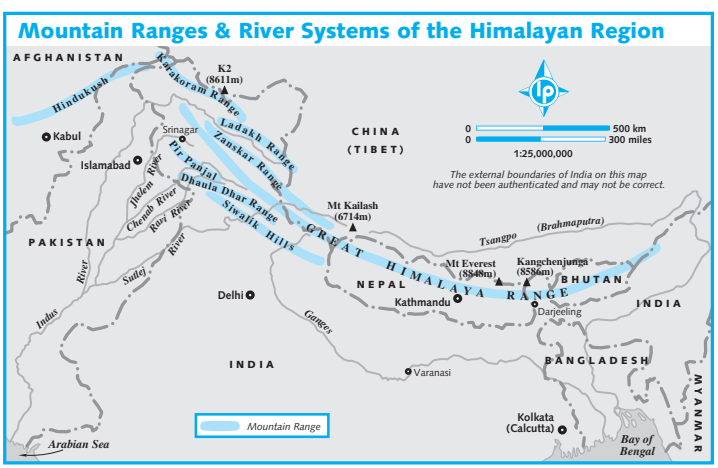
Fires Don't encourage campfires. Bring ample supplies of kerosene, and supply a stove and kerosene for your crew.

Food Bring a minimum of non-biodegradable food. If you are employing a cook, brief them beforehand. What you don't carry in terms of tins you don't have to carry out as empty cans! Also ensure that you buy all major food supplies before undertaking the trek, in particular staples such as rice and flour, so as not to put pressure on the economy of local villages along the trail.

Conservation Do not disturb or attempt to feed wildlife. Do not buy items made from endangered species, pick wildflowers or gather medicinal plants.

The **Great Himalaya Range** is the principal mountain range dividing the Indian subcontinent from the Tibetan plateau. From Nanga Parbat (8125m) in the west, the range stretches for over 2000km to the mountains bordering Sikkim and Bhutan in the east. The West Himalaya is the part of this range that divides Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh from Ladakh. The highest mountains here are Nun (7135m) and Kun (7077m). East of Kashmir, the Himalaya extends across to the Baralacha Range in Himachal Pradesh before merging with the Parvati Range to the east of the Kullu Valley. It then extends across Kinnaur Kailash to the Swargarohini and Bandarpunch ranges in Uttarakhand. Further east it is defined by the snow-capped range north of the Gangotri Glacier and by the huge peaks in the vicinity of Nanda Devi (7816m), the highest mountain in the Indian Himalaya. Treks across the Great Himalaya include the Shingo La, Umasi La and Kang La treks out of Padum, and the Pin Parvati trek out of the Kullu Valley. The Kuari Pass and Milam Glacier & Nanda Devi treks also provide an appreciation of the extent of this range. East of Nepal the Great Himalaya Range extends across central Sikkim including Khangchendzonga (8586m), the world's third-highest peak. The East Himalaya is breached by the headwaters of the Tista River, which forms the geographical divide between the verdant alpine valleys to the south and the more arid regions that extend north to Tibet. Trekking possibilities are at present confined to the vicinity of the Singalila Ridge, an impressive range that extends south from the main Himalaya and forms the border between India and Nepal.

The **Pir Panjal** is located south of the Great Himalaya with an average elevation of 5000m. From Gulmarg in the northwest it follows the southern rim of the Kashmir Valley to the Banihal Pass and can be seen on many of the treks outlined in the Kashmir chapter. Here the Pir Panjal meets the ridgeline separating the Kashmir Valley from the Warvan Valley. From Banihal the Pir Panjal sweeps southeast to Kishtwar and then to the east, where it forms the divide between the Chandra and Ravi Valleys. Treks that cross the Pir Panjal in this region include the Kugti Pass and Hampta Pass to Lahaul. East of the Kullu Valley it merges with the Great Himalaya Range. The Pir Panjal is breached only once – at Kishtwar, where the combined waters of the Warvan



MT KAILAS: THE CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE

For the ancient geographer, the complexities of the Himalaya were a constant source of speculation. From the earliest accounts, Mt Kailas was believed to be the centre of the universe with the river systems of the Indus, the Tsanpo (Brahmaputra) and the Sutlej all flowing from its snowy ridges and maintaining the courses that they had followed prior to the forming of the Himalaya. The Sutlej flows directly from Tibet through the main Himalaya Range to the Indian subcontinent, the Indus flows west until it rounds the Himalaya by the Nanga Parbat massif, and the Tsanpo (Brahmaputra) flows eastwards for nearly 1000km around the Assam Himalaya and descends to the Bay of Bengal.

and Chandra Rivers meet to form the Chenab River, one of the main tributaries of the Indus.

Lying to the south of the Pir Panjal are the snow-capped **Dhaula Dhar** that are easily identifiable behind Dharamsala where it forms the divide between the Ravi and the Beas Valleys. The treks to Kareri Lake and the Indrahar Pass are included in this section. To the east it extends across Himachal Pradesh forming the high ridges of the Largi Gorge and extending south of the Pin Parvati Valley before forming the impressive ridgeline east of the Sutlej River. There it forms the snow-capped divide between the Sangla Valley and upper Tons catchment area in the Garhwal, including the Har ki Dun Valley. Refer to the Rupin Pass and Har ki Dun treks. Beyond the Bhagirathi River it forms the range between Gangotri and Kedarnath before merging with the main Himalaya at the head of the Gangotri Glacier as seen on the Source of the Ganges trek.

The **Siwalik Range** lies to the south of the Dhaula Dhar, with an average elevation of 1500m to 2000m. They are the first range of hills encountered en route from the plains and are geologically separate from the Himalaya. They include the Jammu Hills and Vaishno Devi, and extend to Kangra and further east to the range south of Mandi. In Uttarakhand they extend from Dehra Dun to Almora before heading across the southern border of Nepal. Geologically its ongoing activity is responsible for the high seismicity of this zone, which is one reason why there has been such great concern about the large-scale construction of dams in the region.

The **trans-Himalaya** to the north of the Great Himalaya are no less complex and include the Zanskar, Stok, Ladakh and East Karakoram ranges. The **Zanskar Range** forms the backbone of Ladakh south of the Indus River, stretching from the ridges beyond Lamayuru in the west across the Zanskar region, where it is divided from the main Himalaya by the Stod and Tsarap valleys, the populated districts of the Zanskar Valley. The Zanskar Range is breached where the Zanskar River flows north, creating awesome gorges until it reaches the Indus River just below Leh. Treks traversing the Zanskar Range include Singge La to Lamayuru and Remote Zanskar treks. To the east of the Zanskar region the range continues through Lahaul and Spiti, providing a complex buffer zone between the main Himalaya and the Tibetan plateau. It continues across the north of Kinnaur before extending west across Uttarakhand, where it again forms the intermediary range between the Himalaya and the Tibetan plateau, which includes Kamet (7756m). The range finally peters out northeast of the Kali River – close to the border between India and Nepal. The **Stok Range** lies immediately to the south of the Leh and includes the Markha Valley and Stok Circuit treks. The **Ladakh Range** lies to the north of the Indus Valley and

HIMALAYAN VEGETATION ZONES

The Indian Himalaya can be broadly divided into three geographic zones that have a marked effect on the vegetation.

WEST HIMALAYA – NORTH OF THE GREAT HIMALAYA DIVIDE

This includes Ladakh, Zanskar, upper Lahaul and Spiti. It includes an alpine zone found generally from 4000m to 5000m and even higher as you move north towards the Karakoram Range. The zone is often virtually devoid of vegetation bar sage bush and the grassy meadow found alongside a watercourse. The sub-alpine zone extends from 3500m to 4000m and includes stunted junipers. A lower zone, from 3000m to 3500m, includes willows and cultivated poplars. Irrigated barley fields, sprinkled with leguminous plants, geraniums, aquilegias and louseworts, thrive in the depths of the valleys.

SOUTH OF THE HIMALAYAN RANGE

A vast region that includes the Kashmir Valley and the regions of Himachal and Uttarakhand. It supports an alpine zone from 3500m to 4500m, which includes the open grazing meadows at the higher levels, while birch groves mark the lower level of this zone. The temperate zone extends from 1500m to 3500m. Conifers, including firs, hemlocks, pines and cedars, are found between 2500m and 3500m, while oaks and blue pine are found at the lower elevations. In regions where the forests have been cleared, cornfields are found between 1800m and 3000m and rice paddies somewhat lower, between 1500m and 2000m, as in the Kashmir and Kullu Valleys.

The tropical and subtropical zone in Himachal and Uttarakhand includes long-needled pine, sal and oak forests, while thorn scrub is found closer to the Indian plains where much of the original forest belt has been cleared. In the more remote mountain districts the forest floor has more luxuriant cover, including bamboo, ferns and shrubs. The upper limit of this zone is 1400m.

EAST HIMALAYA

This includes Sikkim and Darjeeling and is, in many respects, an ecological extension of eastern Nepal. The region includes an alpine zone, which extends between 3500m and 4500m, while the sub-alpine zone with junipers and dwarf rhododendrons extends from 3300m to 4000m. Note that there is an absence of birch trees in this zone. The temperate forest range extends from 1800m to 3500m and includes a band of conifers, magnolias, daphnes and rhododendrons at the upper levels, and an oak, bamboo and rhododendron band between 2000m and 3000m, while at the lower elevations there are oak, alder and chestnut trees. This merges with the subtropical forests, which are better preserved than those in the West Himalaya. Among the deciduous and evergreen forests the sal tree is the most easily identified in southern Sikkim. In the tropical zone a variety of shrubs, bamboos, palms and ferns are also found.

merges with the Kailas Range in Tibet while northeast the **East Karakoram Range** forms the geographical divide between India and Central Asia. It includes many high peaks, including Teram Kangri (7464m), Saltoro Kangri (7742m) and Rimo (7385m), and the Karakoram Pass (5672m), historically the main trading link between the markets of Leh, Yarkand and Kashgar.

WILDLIFE

Animals

To appreciate the habitat of animals, particularly in the West Himalaya, it is worthwhile considering the north/south divide. Simply put, those animals living north of the main Himalayan Range in the drier trans-Himalayan regions and those living to the south in the more verdant, forested valleys. It would be hard to devise a wildlife trek of the region

without at least including the proviso that the amount of time spent on the trek plus an inordinate amount of luck will play a big part in what you see.

To the north of the Himalayan divide is the **snow leopard**, an icon of the Himalaya and a species that has been on the endangered list for many generations. They are solitary creatures, with a long bushy tail. Although they are protected, villagers still occasionally kill them when they attempt to prey on domestic animals. The regions of Ladakh, Spiti and Lahaul provide the biggest concentration of snow leopards in the world, yet even here their numbers are rapidly dwindling. Where there are snow leopards there are also *bharal* (blue sheep). Not classified in the genus ovis along with other sheep, blue sheep are distinguished by their thick, horizontal horns and the dark-blue wool on the rumps of the males. In spring they graze the high pastures of Ladakh and Zanskar, Lahaul and Spiti and also in the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. By contrast the **urial** is the smallest of the wild sheep. Clearly identified by their large, curved horns they can be found in Ladakh and the East Karakoram valleys, although its numbers are seriously depleted. Also known as the Tibetan wild ass, the **kiang** is normally found in herds of 10 to 20. They graze the high grassy plateaus in the Rupshu region east of Ladakh and adjoining regions close to the Tibetan border. **Wolf packs** are found north of the Himalaya Range in the arid regions of Ladakh, Zanskar and Spiti. During summer they wander the highest and most remote ridges in search of lone wild goats or sheep. In early winter they descend to the valleys to prey on stray domestic animals. To protect their stock, villagers in Ladakh construct stone enclosures, often on the outskirts of their village, in order to trap the wolf or occasional snow leopard. While sightings of large packs are rare, there is a distinct possibility of hearing them in the vicinity of a settlement on winter nights. Although not strictly confined to the north of the Himalaya, the **marmot** are scattered widely throughout the West Himalaya. These large rodents of the squirrel family live in large colonies in networks of deep burrows where they hibernate during winter. Their loud whistling can be heard for a considerable distance and alerts all animals in the vicinity to oncoming danger from predators, including shepherds, who trap them for their thick, golden-brown fur. While found in Ladakh, Kashmir, Lahaul, Zanskar and Himachal Pradesh, they are less common in Uttarakhand.

It is not surprising that there are a great variety of animals living on the forested slopes or on the verdant meadows south of the Himalaya. These include the **Himalayan black** and **brown bears**. The black bear is about 1.2m to 1.5m (4ft to 5ft) high and weighs up to 180kg. It has a smooth black coat and a distinctive white 'V' on its chest. Bears are attracted to the ripening cornfields during summer. At other times, they seek refuge in the temperate and coniferous forests before hibernating for several months in winter. Brown bears are distinguished not by the colour of their fur but by the distinctive hump above their shoulder. They are larger than the black bears and tend to be found on the high-alpine pastures foraging for edible roots and grasses. The **forest leopard** (panther) are larger than snow leopards and inhabit the temperate forests near villages and towns such as Naini Tal, Mussoorie and Shimla, where they prey on domestic dogs. To combat this, shepherds often place huge collars with iron spikes around the necks of their dogs. The **langur**, the long-tailed grey monkey with a black face, is also found in the temperate forests, often in the vicinity of villages. It migrates in early spring

from the temperate to the lower coniferous forests. The **rhesus monkey** is found at lower elevations. Smaller than the langur, it is brownish-red in colour and often seen close to towns and hill stations. It is a habitat they share with the **jungle cats**, long-legged cats that are sandy-coloured to grey-brown and also known as swamp cats. They have a short, banded tail and prey on small mammals, birds and reptiles. They inhabit the temperate forests of Himachal and Uttarakhand as high as 2400m alongside **pine martens** recognised by their dark slender body and long tail, and distinguished by the yellow markings on their throat.

There are also a variety of wild sheep and goats. These include the **alpine ibex**, one of the largest Himalayan goats. It has impressive serrated, sweeping horns and, like the *bharal*, selects the highest crags for protection during summer. They are found west of the Sutlej River throughout Himachal, Kashmir and West Ladakh. The wool from the underbelly is renowned for its fine quality and is used in the famous Kashmir pashmina shawl. The **serow** and **goral** are classified as part of the antelope-goat family. The serow favours the forest ravines, while the goral roam the forest clearing and the lower grassy slopes. **Kakor** (barking deer) can also be seen. They are short in stature with a reddish-brown body and a dog-like bark. They are found in grassy, heavily forested slopes throughout Uttarakhand, Himachal and Kashmir. They often share grazing with the **musk deer** that are much sought after for their musk glands. They have curving tusks instead of horns and are mainly found in birch groves. In recent times their numbers have been seriously depleted. Then there is the **Kashmir stag**, a subspecies of the red deer that is nowadays found only in the Dachigam National Park in Kashmir. In summer they roam the birch groves at around 4000m, before returning to the lower elevations in early winter. The ongoing political unrest in Kashmir has made them an easy target for poachers.

George Schaller's *Stones of Silence* includes invaluable illustrations of the wild sheep and goat species including Kashmir markhor, alpine ibex, the Punjab urial and the *bharal*.

Birds

The diversity of birdlife in the Himalaya would impress the seasoned bird-watcher while for the novice a trek is enhanced with a good field guide, a pair of lightweight binoculars and adequate time to wander the forests and meadows.

The birds of prey always impress. They include the huge **golden eagle**, up to a metre in length seen well above the treeline in search of young lambs and musk-deer fawns. The **Himalayan bearded vulture** (lammergeier) is no less impressive with a wingspan that can extend to 2.4m. The solitary **kestrel** is also seen at altitude hovering the thermals in search of prey.

The colourful **Himalayan pheasants** are always worthy of note. The **koklass** can be seen on the forested slopes while the **kalij** with its bright crimson head (deep black plumage in the male, and russet-brown in the female) are sighted darting through the upper forest bands. In Ladakh the **chukor partridge** is often the first bird heard and seen scurrying up the barren hillside.

The comparative lack of vegetation north of the Great Himalaya Range works in favour of sightings, including the **black-billed magpie**, **Tibetan finches**, **white tailed rubycoats** and the **horned lark**. The migratory ducks, geese and cranes including the **black-necked crane** can often be seen in the wetlands alongside the vast lakes of Rupshu in Ladakh. The Tibetan owl is also worthy of inclusion in the notebooks as well as the flocks of finches and accentors.

On a trek ascending the forest south of the Himalayan divide there is no shortage of colourful species. On treks in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand these include the **yellow-billed blue magpie** while the distinctive **white-capped redstart** is regularly seen along the watercourses with a variety of **dippers** and **forktails**. In the oak and conifer forests the **woodpeckers**, **jays**, **cuckoos**, **scarlet minivets**, **fantails**, **bulbuls**, **thrushes**, **warblers** and **finches** would provide every reason to while away a few hours each day on the trail before reaching camp.

In Darjeeling the **monal** and **tragopan pheasants** are often heard but not always seen in the forest undergrowth while **redstarts**, **forktails**, **finches** and **owls** are found in the mixed rhododendron, oak and conifer forests. The **blood pheasant** is the national bird of Sikkim, while apart from the forest sightings there is a possibility of viewing **migratory wildfowl** as they fly beneath the awesome flanks of Khanchendzonga en route to the high-altitude lakes on the border of Tibet.

Otto Pfister's *Birds of the Himalaya* is the pocket guide to take on a trek to identify the many species in the forests and alpine and hill resorts and across the West Himalaya, Darjeeling and Sikkim. The serious bird-watcher may also refer to the Salim Ali's classic *Indian Hill Birds*.

Plants & Trees

The alpine regions of Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand support a wide range of flowering plants, many of which are similar to the mountain flora found in Europe and America. The flowering season commences as soon as the snow melts along the stream courses. However, timing is crucial when planning a trek during this period, for not long after this, the shepherds lead their flocks of sheep and goats to the high meadows to graze before continuing on their summer migration. The monsoon rains in July and August see the alpine flora at their best. Although trekking conditions may not be ideal with thick blankets of cloud often covering the peaks for days, this is the time for the enthusiast to identify the many flowering species including **aster**, **gentians**, **primula**, **euphorbia**, **delphinium**, **saxifrage** and the exquisite **Himalayan blue poppy**. A trek to the Hampta Valley out of Manali or to one of the high-altitude *bugyals* (meadows) in the Garhwal including the Valley of the Flowers is recommended. Kashmir is ideal at this time as it is subject to a modified monsoon climate and escapes some of the heaviest rains. The Harimukh Alpine Lakes Trek is by far the best option. In Darjeeling and Sikkim the treks to the alpine pastures in late spring offer an attractive range of flowering species before the onset of the heavy monsoon rains in late June.

The trans-Himalayan regions of Ladakh, Lahaul and Spiti offer interesting excursions. The region is sometimes subject to an occasional monsoon storm that ensures an abundance of flowering varieties including **geraniums**, **aquilegias and lousewarts** on the lee side of the Himalaya. Even on the approach to high passes at over 4500m it is heartening to see hardy varieties burst into bloom in an otherwise barren landscape that has been under snow for up to 10 months of the year.

South of the Great Himalaya Range you can almost calculate the elevation by checking the dominant tree bands. On a trek above the Kullu Valley, for instance, the lower elevation of birch trees are around 3700m (and when the leaves start turning to gold it's a sure indication of the onset of autumn), rhododendron at 3600m, conifer at 3500m and holly oak at around 2200m. Some of the more easily identifiable trees include the **oak** that forms whole forests upward from 2100m. It is common on steep, rocky, south-facing slopes from which the snow cover clears quickly. The trees are very important in the hill villages and cultivated areas of the temperate hill forests as they are extensively lopped for cattle fodder. The wood is used locally for building and it also

gives good fuel. The bark contains much tannin. The **horse chestnut** is a large deciduous tree of up to 30m or more in height, found in forests and shady ravines across the altitude zone from 1800m to 3000m. The trees are impressive for their large, upright pyramidal clusters of white flowers, the petals often streaked with red at the base. The leaves are distinctive, long-stalked and divided in a palm-like manner. The fruit is a leathery capsule, usually with one large shining seed. Like many trees in the Himalaya, the leaves are lopped as stock fodder. Superb forests of **horse chestnuts**, interspersed with **maples** and the **walnut tree** can be found towards the upper reaches of the Ganges tributaries in Kumaon and Garhwal. As with the walnut trees, the wood is often used for turned articles and the bark is used medicinally.

For trekkers it is sometimes hard to imagine that there are more than 800 species of **rhododendron**. The rhododendron arboreum is the most widely distributed in the Himalaya. It has many different forms, some reaching a height of 15m. Its flowers range from red and pink to white, usually at the higher altitudes. The mass blooms are superb in early spring although they are at their best in late April and early June in Sikkim. The flowers are presented as offerings in hillside temples, and the wood is frequently used for fuel. On the early stages of many treks is the **chir pine** that forms extensive forests from 500m to 2700m. A large, slim, triangular tree, up to 40m high, it is distinctive for its very thick and deeply fissured rough bark. The chir discourages undergrowth and the forest floor is thick and slippery with the fallen clusters of long, needle-like leaves. Mature trees can withstand forest fires, but the young seedlings are not fire resistant, so repeated burnings make regeneration impossible. The sapwood has a sweet-smelling resin and the bark yields tannin used in dyeing. Oil of turpentine is obtained from the wood and, although the timber is not particularly durable, it is used for construction. By contrast the **Himalayan birch** marks the upper limit of the tree line up to 4300m. The birch tolerates long periods of snow (and therefore dry soil), and frequently can be seen clinging in isolated, spindly clusters to slopes of high-altitude gullies, where the snow is packed and lasts long into the spring. On the young trees in particular, the bark peels off round the tree in thin transverse sheets. It makes excellent kindling for lighting fires, and traditionally has been used as paper. The bark is also used locally for waterproofing and roofing huts. Frequently swept down in landslides, the thin, gnarled trunks are used by shepherds as supports for tent shelters.

Oleg Plolunin and Adam Stainton's *Flowers of the Himalaya* is an indispensable guide for identifying trees and flowering species in the various regions of the Indian Himalaya.

Endangered Species

There is general acknowledgment that most wildlife species in the Indian Himalaya are endangered. Findings indicate that the numbers of Kashmir Stag in the Indian Himalaya are restricted to just a handful in the Dachigam Sanctuary, while the number of snow leopards has been drastically reduced in the past few decades. Several wild sheep and goat species, including the markhor, are now almost extinct in India. The kiang is facing the same prospects in Ladakh, while the numbers of musk deer are seriously declining throughout the Indian hill states. In the East Himalaya, the red panda is similarly endangered.

While most endangered wildlife species are protected in the Indian Himalaya, the funding and resources have not been sufficient to stem other developments. The continual encroachment of mountain regions through logging, and the increasing need to clear land for cultivation have contributed to the decline in wildlife numbers. Poaching has also

taken its toll. Snow-leopard pelts can fetch many thousands of dollars on the black market, while the skins of Tibetan wolves and lynxes are also highly prized. Musk deer are hunted for the musk gland used in the preparation of perfume, while Tibetan antelope or chiru are hunted for their fine wool for the shahtoosh shawl, although there are projects underway to determine the possibilities of breeding them in captivity.

Hunting protected sheep and goat species for their meat is a further problem. Previously inaccessible regions are now within easy reach of roads. Army personnel have exacted their toll on urial and markhor in the eastern Karakoram, while shepherds in the remote alpine valleys are responsible for the declining numbers of ibex and *bharal*.

Some protective measures have been enforced, including the establishment of wildlife reserves and sanctuaries. However, for creatures such as the snow leopard and red panda, the only chance of survival may be captivity breeding. Unfortunately, success rates are low, and even if successfully bred, there is little evidence that these animals can be successfully returned to the wild.

NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE SANCTUARIES

The creation of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries has gone some way towards protecting the endangered flora and fauna in various regions of the Himalaya. However, the Himalaya is not a wilderness region and many national parks are created in areas where people have lived for centuries. The challenges of creating a controlled environment are therefore of a different nature from those in other countries.

Ladakh

The Hemis High Altitude National Park was created in 1981 and includes an area from the south of the Indus River across the Stok Range to the Markha Valley. The preservation of wildlife has largely been successful, although there are still reports of snow leopards being stoned to death by villagers whose domestic sheep and goats are being attacked.

Kashmir

The vast Kishtwar National Park was created in the early 1980s to include the area northeast of the Warvan Valley and northwest of Chenab Valley up to the main Himalayan watershed. This ambitious plan did not, however, take into account the large-scale summer migration of the shepherds grazing huge flocks of sheep and goats on the already fragile hillsides. Closer to the Kashmir Valley, wildlife in the Dachigam National Park has been under threat since the outbreak of political unrest in 1990.

Himachal Pradesh

The creation of the Greater Himalayan National Park in 1984 has helped to preserve a wide variety of fauna and flora in the Sainj, Tirthan and Jiwa to the east of the Kullu Valley. However, there is concern that the lower reaches of these beautiful valleys may be affected by the nearby dam project in the Larji Gorge. A similar project is currently underway in the Kanawer Sanctuary in the upper Parbati Valley in order to provide towns in the lower Kullu Valley with hydroelectricity. Close by, the Pin National Park in Spiti extends from the eastern watershed of the Parvati Valley, providing a sanctuary for protected species such as the snow leopard.

The Manali Sanctuary immediately to the west of the town of Manali is the most accessible sanctuary for visitors to the Kullu Valley. It extends through mixed forest with many orchids and ferns to the alpine pastures where a wide variety of wildflowers thrive during the summer months.

HIMALAYAN TOURISM – SOME FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

In order to ascertain the impact of Himalayan tourism, modern studies have tried to strike a balance between local interests and the interests of visitors, including tourists to hill stations, pilgrims, and trekkers and mountaineers.

MOUNTAIN TOURISM

It is evident that most Indian hill towns have been subjected to inappropriate developments that place undue strain on the local resources.

This is particularly apparent in the more popular hill stations, including Shimla, Naini Tal, Mussoorie and Darjeeling.

Manali, in a fertile alpine valley in northern Himachal Pradesh has experienced a huge increase in the number of hotels, lodges and guesthouses. Orchards and natural surrounding have been destroyed, with many discerning tourists now staying elsewhere in the Kullu Valley.

Development in Leh, the capital of Ladakh, has been of a different nature. Since 1974 the influx of tourism has placed considerable strain on the local resources, with many tourists demanding facilities that are almost impossible to provide. The large number of foreign tourists has also placed undue pressure on the local culture, with the Ladakhi people often discarding traditional practices for the sake of the tourist dollar.

However, Himalayan tourism has not been without some benefits. It has been a major source of employment, slowing migration to the big cities. It has also stimulated local arts and crafts while increasing awareness of a region's history and culture. The influx of tourists has also provided gompas (Tibetan Buddhist monasteries) and mandirs (Hindu temples) with a vital source of income that has been channelled into preserving important buildings and wall paintings. New ideas from other regions of India – and abroad – have also helped develop fresh perspectives, and facilitated innovations such as solar heating, waste disposal and micro-hydroelectric schemes.

PILGRIMAGE TOURISM

In the past, pilgrims made few demands on their travels through the Himalaya. Nowadays the development of roads has resulted in greater accessibility and greater numbers of pilgrims. In Uttarakhand the pilgrimage season in May and June to the Char Dham attracts something in the vicinity of 250,000 pilgrims. This has had a devastating effect on the local mountain environment. Over the last decade a number of associated interest groups, including the Gangotri Conservation Project, have been able to redress some of the worst of the developments. However, further funding is imperative in order to ensure that projects can be completed here and at the other pilgrim centres.

TREKKING AND MOUNTAINEERING

While a far smaller number of mountain tourists venture beyond the trailhead, the environmental and cultural problems caused by a steadily increasing number of trekkers is a cause for concern. 'Tread lightly' philosophies have yet to be reconciled with increasing pressure on the local environment. Tin cans, plastic and other non-biodegradable rubbish are not properly disposed of, wood is used for fuel, and the demand on campsites has resulted in the pollution of streams and rivers.

There has also been a gradual undermining of cultural values. However, as with mountain tourism, trekking can help to stimulate interest in traditional handicrafts and may also provide employment and halt the trend of migration from the mountain villages to the cities. More discriminating trekkers may also act as a pressure group to help preserve threatened wildlife species and delicate areas.

Uttarakhand

In 1983 the former Uttar Pradesh (UP) Government introduced restrictions on the movement into the Bhyundar Valley (Valley of the Flowers) and the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. It was maintained that the local shepherds, trekkers and mountaineers had damaged the flora and fauna and that a suitable period of time was necessary for these regions to regenerate. This resulted in the creation of the Nanda Devi National Park that included the Nanda Devi Sanctuary and the alpine regions to the south that extend from Auli to Rup Kund.

On the border of Himachal and Uttarakhand, the Govind National Park was originally established as a wildlife sanctuary in 1955. It provides many opportunities for trekkers to explore the Har ki Dun Valley and the adjacent valleys leading to the Kinnaur.

Darjeeling & Sikkim

Legislation to curb logging and deforestation of the luxuriant forests west of Darjeeling and southern Sikkim has been enforced over the last decade. The establishment of the Singalila National Park has made some impact on the preservation of the forests and wildlife habitat. The creation of the Khangchendzonga National Park, together with forest check posts and trekking permits at Yuksam, has contributed to the preservation of some of the finest rhododendron and magnolia forests in the Himalaya.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Developments relating to mining, forestry, tourism and the defence of the region's sensitive political borders compound the environmental problems in the Himalaya. Population growth increases the need for energy, and roads and changes in land cultivation lead to overgrazing and increasingly single-crop agriculture.

The construction of large-scale dams – including the Bakra Dam harnessing the waters of the Sutlej in Himachal Pradesh, the Tehri Dam harnessing the waters of the Bhagirathi River in Uttarakhand, and the dam construction on the Chenab below Kishtwar in the Jammu & Kashmir state – have drawn significant protests from environmentalists. Other developments, particularly in the Kullu, Hampta and Parvati valleys in Himachal Pradesh, have also been a cause for concern.

Deforestation for fuel or to increase the amount of land for cultivation is a further issue. Wildlife and forest officers working in remote locations rarely command the financial resources to curtail illegal logging, stop plant hunters stripping the hillsides of medicinal herbs or to prevent poaching or hunting of protected species.

Overgrazing is common throughout the alpine regions of the Himalaya. There are few alpine meadows that have not attracted huge flocks of sheep and goats as Gaddi and Bakraval shepherds search continually for new pastures. In the lower regions the Gujar, shepherds create similar problems while grazing their buffalo to supply milk and cheese to the local markets. Failure to follow a viable crop rotation has led to cash crops, particularly in Uttarakhand where chir plantations have replaced the mixed oak forest.

Road developments have also taken their toll on the environment. While it is probable that 90% of remote villages in the Indian Himalaya will be connected by road in the next few generations, it is relevant to consider that much recent construction has paid little regard to the environment or to the fact that many roads can only be utilised for a few months each year.

THE HIMALAYAN ENVIRONMENT TRUST

Since 1990, the **Himalayan Trust** (www.himalayanenvironment.org) has sought to gain cooperation from Pakistan, Nepal and India to draw attention to the environmental problems affecting the Himalaya. In doing so it has drawn on worldwide support to help protect the Himalayan environment. The aims and objectives set out by the Trust include the following:

SUPPORT GROUPS

The mobilisation of support from mountaineers, trekkers, alpine clubs, adventure tour operators and the Himalayan region governments for protecting the environment, its flora, fauna and natural resources, as well as the customs and interests of the local people.

CODES OF CONDUCT

To evolve a code of conduct and ethics to be followed by all visitors to the Himalayan region, as part of a continuing effort to maintain and sustain the well-being of the Himalayan environment.

PROMOTING AWARENES

To hold international conferences, seminars and Himalayan tourist meetings on problems relating to the Himalayan environment, and to focus world attention on such matters.

INFORMATION

To exchange information, and co-operate, with other local, national and international agencies engaged in similar work.

GUIDELINES FOR ADVENTURE TOURISM

To evolve necessary guidelines – in consultation with the Himalayan countries – concerning adventure tourism, to avoid the overcrowding of trails and to achieve a fair spread of trekkers and mountaineers throughout the Himalaya.

CLEAN-UP PROGRAMS

To encourage clean-up programs and evolve healthy environmental practices.

In order to appreciate the environmental impact in the Himalayan regions many government reports have been commissioned. Some have incorporated developments and reforms adopted in other mountain regions of the world, for example in the European Alps, North America or the Southern Alps of New Zealand. The more successful ones have taken into consideration the fact that the Himalaya is characterised by developing economies where the nature of the problems and the level of priorities are different.

The following groups promote conservation in the Indian Himalaya:

GM Pant Institute (www.gdpihed.gov.in) is based in Almora in Uttarakhand. It is a semi-autonomous government organisation researching the impact and development of mountain communities.
Himalayan Environment Trust (www.himalayanenvironment.org) has been in operation since 1989 and focuses on an environmental program in the Gangotri region in the Garhwal.
Kalpaviksh Environmental Action Group (www.kalpavriksh.org) is a key partner with a number of Himalayan NGOs.
Ladakh Ecological Development Center (LEDeG) in Leh has been working for more than 30 years on all aspects of Ladakh's environment and cultural development.
Sikkim Development Foundation (www.sikkim-foundation.org) aims to preserve the state's biodiversity and promote responsible tourism.

Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust in Leh (www.snowleopardindia.org) pioneering field research and education on the snow leopard throughout the rural regions of Ladakh.
Wildlife Institute of India (www.wii.gov.in) in Dehra Dun, undertakes training and conservation programs in the Himalaya.
Wildlife Protection Society of India (www.wpsi-india.org) helps to combat illegal wildlife trade in India.
Wildlife Trust of India (www.wildlifetrustofindia.org) helps to promote awareness on the plight of the chiru – the Tibetan antelope that provides the fine wool for the shahtoosh shawl.
World Wildlife Fund for Nature (India) (www.wwfindia.org) is the Indian chapter of the international wildlife conservation pressure group.

Himalayan Culture

The Indian Himalaya marks the crossroads of Asia's three main religions. The Kashmir Himalaya is the cultural boundary of Islam; the foothills of Jammu, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand region define the northern limits of Hinduism; while Ladakh is predominantly Buddhist. Indeed it would not be hard to devise a three-week trek that passed through all three religious regions as well as a similar range of cultures.

In Ladakh, the original inhabitants the Khampa, can still be seen roaming the Rupshu region on the edge of the vast Tibetan Plateau wandering in search of pastures for their yaks and goats. By contrast, the settled communities in the valleys reflect the work of generations of villagers who gradually adopted irrigation practices. This is clearly evident when following the trekking trails through the remote regions of Ladakh and Zanskar.

Yet although Ladakh's culture is dominantly Buddhist, the majority of its peoples are now Muslim. This includes a sizeable Muslim community in Leh, some being descendants of families who settled at a time when trade was still undertaken over the Karakoram Pass to central Asia. In the outlying regions of Kargil there is a sizeable Shia Muslim community, while Zanskar has a small community of Muslims who have settled there since the 1830s.

The Kashmiri people trace their origins to successive Aryan migrations up the Indus Valley. While the culture was Hindu, the majority of the people were peacefully converted to Islam in the 14th century. This is still the case today, although until 1990 nearly 10% of the Kashmir population were Hindu.

South of the Kashmir Valley are the Dogra and Pahari villagers. The Dogra are the proud hill people of Jammu, while the hill kingdoms that extend across Chamba, Kanga and into the mountain regions of Uttarakhand trace a long and mainly independent Hindu ancestry. This a reflected in many of the treks undertaken out of Manali, Dharamsala and Brahmaur in Himachal Pradesh as well as those, for instance, in the Nanda Devi region of Garhwal and Kumaon.

Among the various mountain people are shepherd groups that are often seen on the trails leading to the high Himalaya. Consider this when selecting a trek, for some of the most memorable evenings can been spent camping alongside shepherd groups as they migrate to and from their summer pastures. These include the Gujar, who trace their origins from central Asia to the northern Indian Plains and onto the Himalayan foothills. They are Muslim and yet even in Kashmir they do not inter-marry or share local cultural traditions.

The Gaddi shepherds were originally from the foothills in the vicinity of the Kangra Valley in Himachal Pradesh. They are Hindu, and are frequently seen crossing the high passes of the Dhaula Dhar and the Pir Panjal with their large flocks of sheep and goats.

Hindu pilgrimages play an important part in the cultural fabric of the Himalaya. These pilgrimages include the annual trek to the Amarnath cave in Kashmir and the trek to Mani Mahesh Kalias out of Brahmaur in Himachal Pradesh. The largest pilgrimages are in Uttarakhand to the sources of the Ganges, including Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath, while for Sikhs there is the pilgrimage to the sacred lake of Hem Kund.

In Sikkim and Darjeeling the people are either Hindu or Buddhist, sharing many cultural traditions with both Nepalese and Tibetan people. The original inhabitants were the Lepchas who migrated from the Assam Hills to Sikkim around the 10th century. Much later, in the 17th century, Tibetans came across the Himalaya and settled in the valleys, while throughout the 19th century Nepalese migrated to Darjeeling and Sikkim. This influx of Tibetans and Nepalese forced the Lepchas to move to more remote regions in Sikkim. A more recent wave of Tibetans arrived after 1959 and some of these communities are found when trekking in southern Sikkim and also while undertaking the trek to Phalut out of Darjeeling.

HILL CULTURE

Village life in the Himalaya is shaped by the seasons and by a multitude of social and religious customs. There are few villages that do not have a *mandir*, gompa or mosque and there are few passes without prayer flags or a stone *cairn* to ensure a safe journey. Enter any settlement and you will receive a traditional greeting, be it *namaste* in a Hindu village, *jule* in a Buddhist village or *salaam* to the elders in a Muslim village.

Religion is an integral part of social life. In Buddhist regions the monastery provides the focus of activity, where a *lama* will attend the birth, marriage and death ceremonies. In traditional Hindu regions the Brahmin priest will do likewise, while the *mullah* holds sway over a Muslim family's social and cultural needs.

Festivals and times of celebration are dictated by religious customs, while even the commencement of the harvest will be determined as much by the village priest as by the weather.

The passage of the seasons is nonetheless integral to village life. As soon as the winter snow melts in the valleys, the first crop of either rice (at elevations up to 2800m) or barley (at higher elevations) is sown. Work in the fields is concentrated on maximising the water supply – by either flooding the rice paddies or attending to the irrigation channels to ensure that the spring snow melt is channelled into the fields. Water mills are serviced and maintained, while all available labour is on hand to tend to the fields and orchards. The workload increases during the harvest period and for this reason it is often harder to secure the services of porters and horse handlers at this time.

Many of the important festivals and ceremonies are held after the harvest. This is the time for weddings or to undertake journeys to distant relatives and towns.

In winter, village life centres on weaving and working in the home. This may include activities such as making copperware in remote villages in Ladakh and the Zanskar, or weaving intricate carpets in Kashmir and Himachal. In some areas, particularly Ladakh, Zanskar, Spiti and Kinnaur, it is a time for important religious festivals, with masked dances performed over several days. It should be noted that the timings, particularly in Ladakh, have been altered in the last decade or two, with some of the more accessible monasteries in the Indus Valley rescheduling their festivals to attract income from tourism.

The tending of domestic animals is also determined by the seasons. For the Gujar shepherds, most of the family head from the lower hills to the high mountain pastures in late spring where they remain throughout summer, tending to their buffalo, and staying close to where they can sell their supplies of milk and cheese. They are closely associated with the Bakraval (Gujar who own mainly goats) who are found grazing their flocks on the alpine slopes of Jammu and Kashmir. The Gaddi shepherds

also follow the same migratory pattern, leading their flocks of sheep and goats to the alpine regions of Himachal Pradesh.

In most other communities the men undertake the shepherding. They establish the summer settlements in localities anywhere from a few days to a few weeks from the village location. The migration is a familiar sight on many treks from Ladakh to Uttarakhand.

On a trek you may pass the villagers taking their packhorses to the nearest trailhead or town where they are engaged by a government department throughout the season. In other regions, including Ladakh and Spiti, it is not uncommon to come across horsemen making their way over high passes to secure timber and other building materials for house construction and repairs that are carried out in the winter.

While village life in the Himalaya is still in general harmony with the seasons, it is not unusual for a member of the family to leave the village for several months each year to work in the hill stations or on the plains or even take a job with the government or army in order to provide cash income for their family.

Education in the form of schools in remote communities is also changing the fabric of traditional values, and the demands for further education are sometimes incompatible with following an agrarian lifestyle. This, combined with a number of other factors, including the introduction of radio and TV to remote communities, is having a significant impact on traditional rural values.

'I don't intend to look after the fields for the rest of my life' is a sentiment often expressed by the younger generation of villagers keen to make the point that the prospects of the city are more attractive than remaining in the Himalaya. This will undoubtedly have a significant impact on mountain lifestyles.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

VISITING A VILLAGE

Your attitude will have a significant impact on the village, particularly when you are meeting the younger generations. Consider how the current pace of change impacts on their lifestyle and lend a sympathetic ear to the barrage of questions regarding your lifestyle and ambitions. Be patient when asked about their education or employment prospects, and appreciate how they are trying to reconcile their ambitions with their obligations to their friends and family. This will assist you to gain a perspective as to what is happening and the extent of cultural changes in their community.

ENTERING A HOME

Always greet villagers appropriately. Use your right hand for all social conduct and wear appropriate clothing. If invited to join a family, never throw food on the fire and do not touch cooking utensils or food while the meals are being prepared. It is also customary not to sit around or approach the hearth until you are invited to do so. It is necessary to ask before taking photographs.

ENTERING A PLACE OF WORSHIP

Common sense is the most important prerequisite. Wait until you are invited into the place of worship before entering, be respectful and do not take photographs without permission. With regard to dress codes, always ensure that you are modestly attired and remove your shoes. Other requirements will vary. In a mosque women should cover their head and shoulders with a shawl or scarf, while all visitors should wash hands and feet before entering. In a gurdwara (Sikh temple) men should cover their heads, while leather items should also be removed. In a *mandir* do not wear leather items and in some places a headscarf must also be worn. When visiting a gompa you should also dress respectfully and approach the places of prayer in a clockwise direction.

RELIGION

Buddhism

The basic teachings of the historical Gautama Buddha date back to the 5th century BC. The Gautama Buddha was a prince who, as a young adult, renounced his standing and riches in order to follow his quest for the means of salvation. After first practising and later rejecting the ascetic lifestyle, he eventually reached enlightenment after a long and intense period of meditation. Soon after, he preached his first sermon at the Deer Park at Sarnath in north India. He expounded the 'four noble truths' – that the world is full of suffering; suffering is caused by human desires; the renunciation of desire is the path to salvation; and this salvation is possible by following the 'eightfold path'. This path included the right views, resolves, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, recollection, and meditation. Collectively they are known as the 'middle way'. The Buddha taught that by following the eightfold path we would recognise the futility of our desires and commence on the progressive stages to enlightenment, returning from one reincarnation to the next until reaching a state of nirvana, the final release from the round of rebirths. The path through this cycle of rebirths is known as karma, a law of cause and effect, which maintains that what you do in one life will gain (or lose) you merit in the next.

The sage Padmasambhava (AD 750–800) had a remarkable influence on the development of Buddhism in the Himalaya and was one of the foremost proponents of Tantric Buddhism. He acknowledged that the appeal of Buddhism could be widened if the tenets of Tantric Buddhism were adapted to the local animistic beliefs. This was eventually to give support to the Buddhist school known as Varjrana Buddhism – the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt.

Although Buddhism was to gain favour after the kings of Tibet invaded Ladakh in the 8th and 9th centuries, it took many generations for the Buddhist teachings to establish themselves.

One of the greatest influences came from Tibet in the 14th century when the saint Tsongkhapa propounded a new order that restored much of the traditional teachings. The Gelukpa order was to become the dominant cultural force in Tibet, while in Ladakh the monasteries of Thikse, Likir and Spitok were founded by this order in the early half of the 15th century. The order was headed by the Dalai Lama, and even today the 14th Dalai Lama undertakes regular visits to the gompas (Tibetan Buddhist monasteries) in Ladakh and Zanskar.

Hinduism

While the term Hinduism was coined by Arab traders in the 8th century, to denote the faith of those who followed either Vishnu or Shiva, the foundations of the beliefs of the Brahmans (Brahmanism) date back to the 10th century BC.

Hinduism's beliefs evolved with the practices of the Brahmin priests and incorporated many complex sacrifices and rituals. The teachings did not evolve in terms of a divine revelation or from the teachings of a particular saint or prophet, and gods and beliefs were changed to suit the circumstances. With the introduction of Buddhism and Jainism, the idea of a trinity of gods emerged, with Brahma featuring as the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer and reproducer.

Essential to the beliefs of the Brahmans was the notion of reincarnation and the doctrine of karma. In this belief we all go through a series of rebirths or reincarnations, which will finally lead to spiritual salvation.

Karma is a law of cause and effect. Bad actions will lead to a lower reincarnation, while good actions will lead to a higher rebirth and increase the chances of gaining release from the round of rebirths.

The morality of a person's action depends on whether it adheres to the *dharma* – the sacred law set out by the Brahmans and embodied in the Gita, a sacred text which sets out the philosophical basis for reincarnation. There are, however, many refinements, which basically depend on the emphasis placed on the believer's relationship with their god – for example, on whether it is based on love and devotion, or whether it is dependent on intellect and theology.

Most Hindus profess to be either a Vaishnava (a follower of Vishnu) or a Shaivist (a follower of Shiva). Yet it is never an exclusive arrangement. Temples devoted to Vishnu will portray a statue of Garuda, the

EARLY PILGRIM TRAILS INTO THE HIMALAYA

From the earliest times the Himalaya has been revered as the 'abode of the gods' and a source of religious inspiration. Pilgrims wandered across the foothills in search of the river systems that flowed from the Himalaya. Beyond the Punjab, pilgrims followed the passage of the Chenab as it twists and turns between the Pir Panjal and the outer ranges of the Dhaula Dhar, while trails along the Indus Valley to Kashmir and Ladakh would have been followed since the time the Aryans first migrated to India.

Religious sites such as the one at Haridwar where the Ganges flows from the mountains to the Indian plains were established. Some pilgrims went further, searching for trails above the deep gorges, crossing landslides and forging their way through thick jungle to discover the confluences of many of the tributaries of the Ganges. Trails deeper into the mountains were established over the centuries as generations of shepherds searched for new pastures, and pilgrims continued in their quest for religious enlightenment.

Knowledge of the Himalayan trails was incorporated in the Mahabharata, the Vedic epic written in the 1st century AD. The Vedic gods were gradually superseded by others, including Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer. Shiva in particular was linked with the popular fertility cults of the bull and the worship of the lingam (phallic symbol). This move was to gain wider appeal with the spread of the Tantric cults and the worship of the mother goddess. This cult of sexual union was raised to divine status, with each god being assigned a formal partner. For example, Shiva was associated with Parvati and Vishnu with Lakshmi. These symbols were gradually integrated into the Himalayan tradition and would later find expression in the pilgrimages being undertaken. For instance, the ice statue inside the sacred Amarnath Cave in Kashmir represents the divine lingam. This sign of cosmic creation would have also supported pilgrimages to many other regions of the Himalaya, including the modern-day pilgrimage to the cave of Vaishno Devi in the Jammu foothills.

It is thought that the four Char Dhams (pilgrimage destinations) – Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath – were founded by the time of the Mauryan Empire in the late 4th century BC. It was also a time when the Royal Highway (a predecessor of the Grand Trunk Road) was constructed across northern India.

Roads were extended across the forested ridges of the Pir Panjal for monks attending the third Buddhist Council in Kashmir around 250 BC. Huge campsites were established along the trail to facilitate their safe passage. After the conference many pilgrims made their way across the Zoji La to the Indus Valley and on to Tibet. Following the course of the Indus, it would have then taken them only a few stages to reach Lake Manasarovar and Mt Kailas, the sacred 6714m peak situated close to the source of the Sutlej and the Brahmaputra (Tsangpo). While it is unclear when the first pilgrimages were made to Mt Kailash there would have been a steady flow of pilgrims by the 3rd century BC – some 2000 years before the first European explorers were to 'discover' the mountain.

divine eagle and Vishnu's vehicle of transport throughout the universe. Shiva, on the other hand, is less prone to rich embellishments. His presence was often associated with fertility cults and the worship of the stone lingam. The annual pilgrimage to the Amarnath Cave in Kashmir, for example, still attracts up to 20,000 pilgrims at the time of the August full moon.

Islam

The fundamental Islamic beliefs are set out in the Quran, a record of the formal utterances and discourses, which Mohammed and his followers accepted as divinely inspired. It includes the famous profession of faith: 'There is but one god, and Mohammed is the Apostle of God'. This declaration evolved in the Arabian Desert in the 7th century. For Mohammed the essential tenet was belief in one supreme god (Allah). This god was the Being, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the all-knowing and all-powerful arbiter of good and evil, and the final judge of all humankind.

Muslims believe that god has sent messengers or prophets to preach the unity of god and to warn them of the Day of Judgement, when, it is said, those who have acted in god's faith will enter the Garden of Paradise, while the non-believers will be forever damned. These prophets, who are not workers of miracles, have included Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The last of the prophets is believed to be Mohammed – a man with no special knowledge apart from that revealed to him during his life and times in the Arabian Desert.

To gain a favourable hearing on the day of Judgement, acts of devotion must be made, including the observance of ritual prayers which are performed five times a day – at daybreak, noon, mid-afternoon, after sunset and in the early part of the night. The acts of devotion also include ritual ablution, the giving of alms, fasting during the month of Ramadan and a pilgrimage to Mecca. In addition, a system of social conduct is set down regarding marriage, divorce, the consumption of alcohol and the making of images. These were all later embodied in Islamic law.

From the time that the call to Allah was first heard in the deserts of Arabia, it took nearly 700 years for it to gain a foothold in the Himalaya. It is the dominant religion in the Kashmir Valley, while much of Baltistan, including Gilgit, Hunza, Skardu, and nearby Drass and Kargil, were gradually converted. Yet this was the limit of Islam and these valleys mark the present boundaries between the Islamic and Buddhist worlds.

Delhi

☎ 011 / pop 2.5 million

Delhi is the capital of India and its major international transport hub. During summer (when most visitors pass through en route to the Himalaya) the city is uncomfortably hot, with temperatures regularly above 40°C. Most people only spend one or two days here before heading to the hills. That said, Delhi is an endlessly fascinating city. To spend more time in Delhi and other states of northern India, plan to visit in autumn. This is one of the best times to trek, and after you return from your trek the temperatures will be starting to fall throughout the rest of India. It is also an ideal time to head onto Nepal if you decide to trek in both countries.

ORIENTATION

Delhi consists of two parts. Old Delhi is a warren of bazaars and backstreets that contains most of the city's Muslim and Moghul monuments. New Delhi is, by contrast, a planned and spacious city, created as a colonial capital by the British. Its hub is a huge circle known as Connaught Place, where you find most airline offices, banks, travel agents, tourist offices and midrange hotels. It's divided up like slices of a pie and these blocks are named alphabetically.

Janpath, running south of Connaught Place, is one of the most important streets and has tourist offices and handicraft stalls. South are the government buildings, museums, residential districts and Chanakyapuri, the diplomatic enclave

In between Old and New Delhi is the area known as Paharganj. This is the main budget travellers' area with many small hotels and restaurants. At the eastern end of Paharganj is New Delhi train station.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

There are plenty of bookshops to stock up on Himalayan titles including **Oxford Bookstore** (☎ 2376 6080; www.oxfordbookstore.com; in Connaught Place) and **Full Circle Bookshop** (☎ 2465 5641; in Khan Market).

Internet Access

Internet centres charge between Rs 30 and Rs 40 an hour and include **DSIDC Cyber Cafe** (N-Block Connaught Place); **Cyber Station** (Main Bazaar, Paharganj) and **Cyber Graphics** (Khan Market).

Medical Services

The **East West Medical Centre** (☎ 2462 3738; B-28 Greater Kailash Part 1) opposite N-Block Market, and the **Apollo Hospital** (☎ 2692 5858; Mathura Rd, Sarita Vihar) are recommended, while the **Apollo Pharmacy** (☎ 3260 4579; G8 Connaught Place) is open 24 hours.

Money

There is no shortage of ATMs in the main shopping areas including Connaught Place, Paharganj and Khan Market as well as numerous foreign-exchange outlets including the State Bank of India and Thomas Cook that both have branches inside the International Airport. International transfer can be made at **Thomas Cook** (☎ 2334 2171; Hotel Janpath, Janpath) and at **Western Union Head Office** (☎ 2335 5061; Sita World Travels, 12 F-Block, Connaught Place) or at one of their many branches.

Photography

For photographic services (including digital) and passport photos these are some dependable options: **Delhi Photo Company** (☎ 2332 0577; 78 Janpath, Connaught Place); **Kinsey Bros** (☎ 2332 4446; 2 A-Block, Connaught Place) and **Rama Color** (☎ 2462 8890; Khan Market). All are open from 10am to 7pm, and closed Sunday.

Post & Telephone

Delhi has lots of phone kiosks where you can make local, interstate and international calls for a fraction of the cost of a call made from a hotel. **DHL** (☎ 2373 7587; Vandana Bldg, 11 Tolstoy Marg) is open every day for international air freight. There is a post office in (6 A-Block) Connaught Place. The **main post office** (Bara Kharak Singh Marg) handles poste restante; ensure mail is addressed to GPO, New Delhi –110001.

Tourist Information

Indian Tourism Delhi (☎ 2332 0008; www.incredibleindia.org; 88 Janpath) gives tourist-related advice as well as a free Delhi map and various brochures. For the Himalayan state offices see p215.

EATING & SLEEPING

Paharganj

Hotel Namaskar (☎ 2358 3456; Chandiwalan, Main Bazaar) and **Major's Den** (☎ 2358 9010 Laksmi Narayan St) have been recommended. Both charge Rs 350 to Rs 450. **Hotel Rak International** (☎ 2356 2478; Tooti Chowk, Main Bazaar) and **Hotel Downtown** (☎ 4154 1529; 4583 Main Bazaar) also have rooms starting from Rs 350.

Hotel Grand Godwin (☎ 2354 6891; www.godwinhotels.com; 41 Arakashan Rd) is one of the most comfortable midrange hotels with rooms from Rs 1200. Also consider the **Pearl Plaza** (☎ 2358 5544; Rjguru Rd) and **Hotel Relax** (☎ 2356 2811; Nehru Bazaar) which both have rooms in the same price range.

Most hotels in Paharganj have good rooftop restaurants including the highly recommended Metropolis Tourist Home restaurant.

Connaught Place

If you stay in Connaught Place you are essentially paying for the central location, not the room quality or service.

Central Court Hotel (☎ 2331 5013; N-Block; r from Rs 1200 has some character, as has the **Hotel Bright** (☎ 4151 7766; www.hotelbrightdelhi.com; 1st fl, 85 M Block; r from Rs 1800. **YMCA International Guest House** (☎ 2336 1561; www.ymcaindia.org; 10 Sansad Marg) and the **YMCA Tourist Hotel** (☎ 2336 1915; Jai Singh Rd) are clean and, although somewhat institutional, are a safe haven for trekkers on their first visit to India. Rooms vary from Rs 1000 to Rs 1800 that includes breakfast, while the YMCA Tourist Hotel also includes dinner.

There are no shortage of top-end hotels including the **Shangri-La Hotel** (☎ 4119 1919; www.shangri-la.com; Ashoka Rd) and the **Taj Mahal Hotel** (☎ 2302 6162; www.tajhotels.com; Man Singh Rd) that charge upwards of US$350 per room. For that you might as well go the renowned **Hotel Imperial** (☎ 2334 1234; www.theimperialindia.com; Janpath) with a range of rates on its website.

Restaurants in Connaught Place offering a selection of European and Indian meals include **The Host** (8F-Block) **United Coffee House** (15E-Block) and **Kwality** (Regal Bldg, Sansad Marg) while the **Saravana Bhavan** (46 Janpath), Sagar **Ratna** (15 K-Block) and **Banana Leaf** (12 N-Block) offer authentic Indian dishes including koftas, dosas and vegetable curries from Rs 100.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The domestic terminals (Terminal 1) of the Indira Gandhi International Airport are around 15km southwest of Connaught Place, and the **International Airport** is a further 8km away. There are frequent (free) shuttle buses between the two terminals. For flight enquiries, call the International Airport (☎ 2565 2011; www.delhiairport.com) or the **Domestic Airport** (☎ 2567 5126).

DOMESTIC

Check-in at the airport for domestic flights is one hour before departure.

Airlines

GOAir (☎ 9223 222 111; Paper Box Rd, Andheri, Mumbai)
Indian Airlines (☎ 24631337; F-Block Malhotra Bldg, Connaught Place)
Jet Airways (☎ 3984 1111; 40 N-Block, Connaught Place)
Kingfisher Airlines (☎ 2373 0238; 42 N-Block, Connaught Place)
MDLR (☎ 4367 0000; MDLR House, Old Judicial Complex, Gurgaon)
Spicejet Air (☎ 987180 3333; 319 Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon)

FLIGHTS FROM DELHI

Destination	Airline	Frequency	(Rs)
Bagdogra (for Siliguri)	Indian Airlines	3 weekly*	19,774
Bagdogra (for Siliguri)	Jet Airways	4 weekly*	19,774
Bagdogra (for Siliguri)	Kingfisher	4 weekly*	19,774
Bagdogra (for Siliguri)	Spicejet	4 weekly*	19,774
Dharamsala (Gaggal)	Kingfisher	daily	7829
Kullu	Kingfisher	daily	10,354
Kullu	MDLR	6 weekly	10,354
Leh	Indian Airlines	3 weekly	12,614
Leh	Jet Airways	weekly (Jun-Sep)	12,614
Leh	Kingfisher	daily	12,614
Srinagar	GOAir	twice daily	13,290
Srinagar	Indian Airlines	twice daily	10,279
Srinagar	Jet Airways	twice daily	13,290
Srinagar	Kingfisher	twice daily	13,290
Srinagar	Spicejet	twice daily	13,290

*other days via Guwahati

Note theses are the standard published one-way economy fares, considerable saving can be made by booking online.

INTERNATIONAL

The International Airport's arrivals hall has 24-hour, money-exchange facilities, a prepaid taxi counter and a tourist information counter. The train booking counter is only open from 8am to 8pm.

Airlines

Aeroflot (☎ 2372 3241; 15-17 Tolstoy Marg)
Air Canada (☎ 4152 8181; World Trade Tower, Barakhamba Rd)
Air France (☎ 2346 6262; 7 Atma Ram Mansion, Connaught Place)
Air India (☎ 2373 1225; Jeeven Bharati Bldg, Connaught Place)
BA (☎ 9512 4412 0747; DLF Plaza Tower, DLF Phase 1, Qutb Enclave, Gurgaon)
E Al Israel Airlines (☎ 2335 7965); Prakash Deep Bldg, 7 Tolstoy Marg)
Emirates (☎ 6631 4444; DLF Centre, Sansad Marg, Connaught Place)
Gulf Air (☎ 2332 4293; 12-G Block, Connaught Pl)
Japan Airlines (☎ 2332 4922; Chandralok Bldg, 36 Janpath)
KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines (☎ 2335 7747; Prakash Deep Bldg, 7 Tolstoy Marg)
Lufthansa Airlines (☎ 2372 4200; 56 Janpath)
Malaysian Airlines (☎ 4151 2121; Gopal Das Bhavan, 28 Barakhamba Rd)
Pakistan International Airlines (☎ 2373 7791; 23 Barakhamba Rd)
Qantas (☎ 2332 1345; Prakesh Deep Bldg, 7 Tolstoy Marg)
Nepal Airlines (☎ 2332 1164; 44 Janpath)
Scandinavian Airlines (☎ 4351 3202; Thapar House, 124 Janpath)
Singapore Airlines (☎ 2335 6283; Ashoka Estate Bldg, 24 Barakhamba Rd)
Thai Airways (☎ 4149 7777; Park Royal Intercontinental Hotel, American Plaza, Nehru Pl)

Bus

The **Interstate Bus Terminal** (ISBT; ☎ 2386 0290) is at Kashmiri Gate, north of Old Delhi train station. It includes the state-run bus companies. It can be chaotic so arrive at least 30 minutes ahead of your departure time. However, for the most convenient long-distance buses to the Himalaya, check with the state tourist offices (see p215). They operate a number of buses from various locations in New Delhi. There are also many private bus companies with booking offices in Paharganj and Connaught Place.

BUS SERVICES TO THE WEST HIMALAYA

While there are many private bus companies operating out of Delhi, the following list includes some of the state bus services operating from the Interstate Bus Terminal (ISBT; Kashmiri Gate).

Destination	Duration	Semi-/Superdeluxe (Rs)
DTC		
Haridwar	8 hours	220/800
Mussoorie	8 hours	450/900
Rishikesh	6 hours	150/250
Dehra Dun	6 hours	350/850
HRTC		
Dharamsala	12 hours	450/850
Kullu	14 hours	300/875
Manali	16 hours	350/940
Shimla	10 hours	350/650
HPTDC		
Almora*	12 hours	450/n/a
Leh	3 days	900/n/a
Kullu	15 hours	300/875
Manali	16 hours	705/940
Naini Tal*	9 hours	380/1000
Raniket*	12 hours	350/n/a
Shimla	10 hours	455/607

* Anand Vihar bus station

Train

For foreigners, its easiest to make ticket bookings at the **International Tourist Bureau** (☎ 2340 5156; www.indianrail.gov.in; 1st fl, New Delhi Railway Station; open 8am to 8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun). There is also a train-booking counter at the airport. Alternatively book on-line.

There are two main train stations in Delhi – Old Delhi train station and New Delhi train station at Paharganj; make sure you know what station your train is departing from. Old Delhi train station was built in the British imperial style before India's independence. New Delhi train station is closer to Connaught Place. If you are departing from (Old) Delhi station you should allow plenty of time to drive through the often snail-paced traffic. Note also that nowadays most trains depart right on time. For more details see Getting There & Away Chapter, p217.

GETTING AROUND

To/From Airport

Many international flights arrive in the late evening/early morning, so it pays to book a hotel in advance and notify it of your arrival time. Hotels can also organise a car to pick you up from the airport. This is a not a cheap option as you have to pay for a car and driver and more often than not a person to wait for you inside the airport as well as the parking charges. However, after a long flight this is a stress-free way to arrive. Alternatively book at pre-paid taxi on arrival. There are booking counters inside the airport or the Delhi Traffic Police prepaid taxi stand just outside the International Airport entrance. The fares are set. Expect to pay around Rs 300 to a hotel in Connaught Place or Paharganj, plus a 25% surcharge between 11pm and 5am.

The **Ex-Servicemen's Air Link Transport service** (☎ 2331 6530; F-Block, Connaught

MAJOR TRAINS FROM DELHI

Train No & Name	Departs (departure point)	Arrives	Sleeper/ 1st class (Rs)
To Dehra Dun			
2017 Shatabdi Exp	7.00am (ND)	12.45pm	470/900
4041 Mussoorie Exp	10.20pm (OD)	8.00am	157/420
To Haridwar			
2017 Shatabdi Exp	7.00am (ND)	11.22am	435/825*
4041 Mussoorie Exp	10.20pm (OD)	5.52am	140/390
To Kathgodam (for Naini Tal)			
5013 Ranikhet Exp	10.45pm (OD)	5.45am	148/875
To New Jalpaiguri (for Darjeeling & Sikkim)			
5622 North East Exp	6.40am (ND)	8.20am	317/1606
2424 Rajdhani Exp	2.00pm (ND)	10.55am	1635/2030/3395**
To Pathankot			
4033 Jammu	9.25pm (OD)	7.20am	202/774
1077 Jhelum Exp	9.00pm (ND)	5.55am	202/774
To Shimla			
4095 Himalayan Queen***	5.50pm (ND)	11.45am	175/322

OD – Old Delhi, ND – New Delhi
*Fares for Shatabdi Express trains are AC Chair/AC Executive Class
**Fares for Rajdhani trains are AC Three Tier/AC Two Tier/AC First Class
***Change at Kalka for narrow gauge to Shimla (departing noon, 5½ hours)

Place) charge Rs 60 and will drop you off at most major hotels. There are no set timetables as the bus operates according to flight schedules.

By late 2009 the Delhi metro is also scheduled to extend to the airport and this will provide an efficient option. The metro is clean and well run, with tickets that will cost a fraction of a taxi. However, if you arrive with heaps of trekking gear this might not always be the most convenient transfer as you will still need a taxi or autorickshaw.

Around Delhi

All taxis and autorickshaws are metred, but you may find the metres 'not working' or that the drivers refuse to use them. Insist on using the metre, or agree on a fare before setting off. If the driver disagrees, look for another one. From 11pm to 5am there is a 25% surcharge for autorickshaws and taxis. To avoid hassles, catch an autorickshaw from a pre-paid booth at 88 Janpath, outside the Indian Tourism Delhi office, New Delhi train station car park or Palika Bazaar Gate No 2, Connaught Place. From Janpath an autorickshaw will cost around Rs 30 to Paharganj (Rs 100 taxi) and Rs 60 (Rs 180 taxi) to Old Delhi railway station.

Buses are very crowded particularly during the morning and evening rush hour. The **metro** (☎ 2436 9912; www.delhimetro.rail.com) is a good alternative and by 2010 will cover a comprehensive area of Delhi. Tickets (Rs 6 to Rs 22) are sold at any metro station and there are also one-or-three day (Rs 70/200) tourist cards for unlimited short-distance travel.

Ladakh

HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit ancient gompas while trekking beyond the **Indus Valley** (p54)
- Cross the high passes of the **Zanskar Range** (p67) for great views across the trans-Himalaya
- Trek in the land of the fabled **snow leopard** (p63)
- Appreciate the trans-Himalaya in the making while trekking though remote **Zanskar** (p79)
- Witness herds of blue sheep high above the **Markha Valley** (p63)
- Share a glass of butter tea or Chang (barley beer) in the Buddhist villages en route to the **Zanskar** (p67)

A land of high passes on the borderlands of Tibet, Ladakh is an integral part of the Jammu & Kashmir State although it is administered by the local Hill Council. This trans-Himalayan region is accessed by trails linking tiny monasteries set on sugarloaf mountains. Explore a landscape devoid of vegetation except in the deep gorges, where whitewashed settlements thrive amid barley fields linked by trails over high, windswept passes. A land where the turn of the prayer wheel reflects the deep-seated Buddhist culture closely akin to Tibet. During the trekking season, May to October, our campsites are shared with yak herders and the occasional mule train laden with grain and salt. From these rarefied heights we scan a distant ridge where the elusive snow leopard silently stalks its prey to the margins of the snowline.

To capture the spirit of Ladakh we undertake a trek out of Leh, Ladakh's historic capital, with opportunities to explore the Markha Valley – the most popular trek in the region. Or head over the high passes linking the renowned Lamayuru monastery with the secluded village of Chiling set alongside the deep, silent current of the Zanskar River. There is also Zanskar, for centuries an independent kingdom locked between the high peaks of the Himalaya and the rugged Zanskar Range. There are many options to trek out of the administrative headquarters of Padum.

They include challenging forays through remote gorges as well as possibilities to traverse the Himalaya Range to the verdant landscape of Himachal Pradesh. Ladakhi is the main language spoken in the region.

HISTORY

The origin of crossing high passes across Ladakh can be traced to its original inhabitants – the Khampa – who roamed the Tibetan borderlands in search of new pastures. The trails up the confines of the Indus Valley were discovered by pilgrims from the time of the 3rd Buddhist Congress in Kashmir.

In tracing these pilgrimages you gain a sense of history in Ladakh. The tantric sage Padmasambhava – the Guru Ringpoche – spent a lifetime wandering the trails of the West Himalaya, while in the 11th century the renowned teacher Ringchen Brangpo is said to have established many of the monastic sites in the remote valleys of Tibet and Ladakh. In the following centuries, a new era of pilgrims, traders and armies travelled between Leh, Guge (Western Tibet), Spiti and Lahaul, regularly crossing the high passes and remote gorges.

While information regarding the trails was passed on from one generation to the next, it was not until the 19th century that European travellers familiarised themselves with Ladakh's complex topography. The Great Trigonometrical Survey was completed in Ladakh in 1863 filling in information about the many formidable peaks and passes. By then, a regular flow of Europeans reached Leh via Kashmir and the Zoji La or via the Kullu Valley and the Baralacha La. Some were intent on crossing the Karakoram Pass to reach the markets of central Asia. These routes were used with increasing regularity until the borders were closed some 60 years ago.

Today the borders are still subject to political dispute. Since the Chinese occupation of Tibet in the 1950s, Ladakh's connections with Tibet have been severed while India's war with China in 1962 ensured that Ladakh was not opened to foreign tourists until 1974, and even now trekking close to the borders is not permitted.

ENVIRONMENT

The trans-Himalayan region of Ladakh is bounded to the south by the snow-capped peaks of the Himalaya Range that includes the twin 7000m peaks of Nun and Kun. North of the high Himalaya lies the fertile region of the Zanskar Valley drained by the waters of the Zanskar River. As the river flows north and eventually into the Indus it forges its way through the Zanskar Range with its jagged ridges and almost barren peaks that sometimes extend above 6000m. Immediately south of the Indus Valley are the peaks of the Stok Range that are easily identifiable from Leh, while to the north is the Ladakh Range that merges with the huge peaks of the east Karakoram.

Refer to the Flora & Fauna boxed text (p54) for an overview of the animals and birdlife that can be seen.

CLIMATE

Ladakh is one of the driest regions in the Indian Himalaya. Leh, the capital of Ladakh, experiences an average of only 110mm of rainfall per year and heavy snowfalls are rare. Ladakh's position to the northeast of the Himalaya Range isolates it from the Indian monsoon. However, areas to the south of the Indus Valley and closer to the Himalaya Range experience a higher rainfall. Padum, in the Zanskar Valley, is subject to the occasional heavy storm that surges over the Himalaya Range in July and August, while in winter the heavy snowfalls block the passes to the rest of Ladakh.

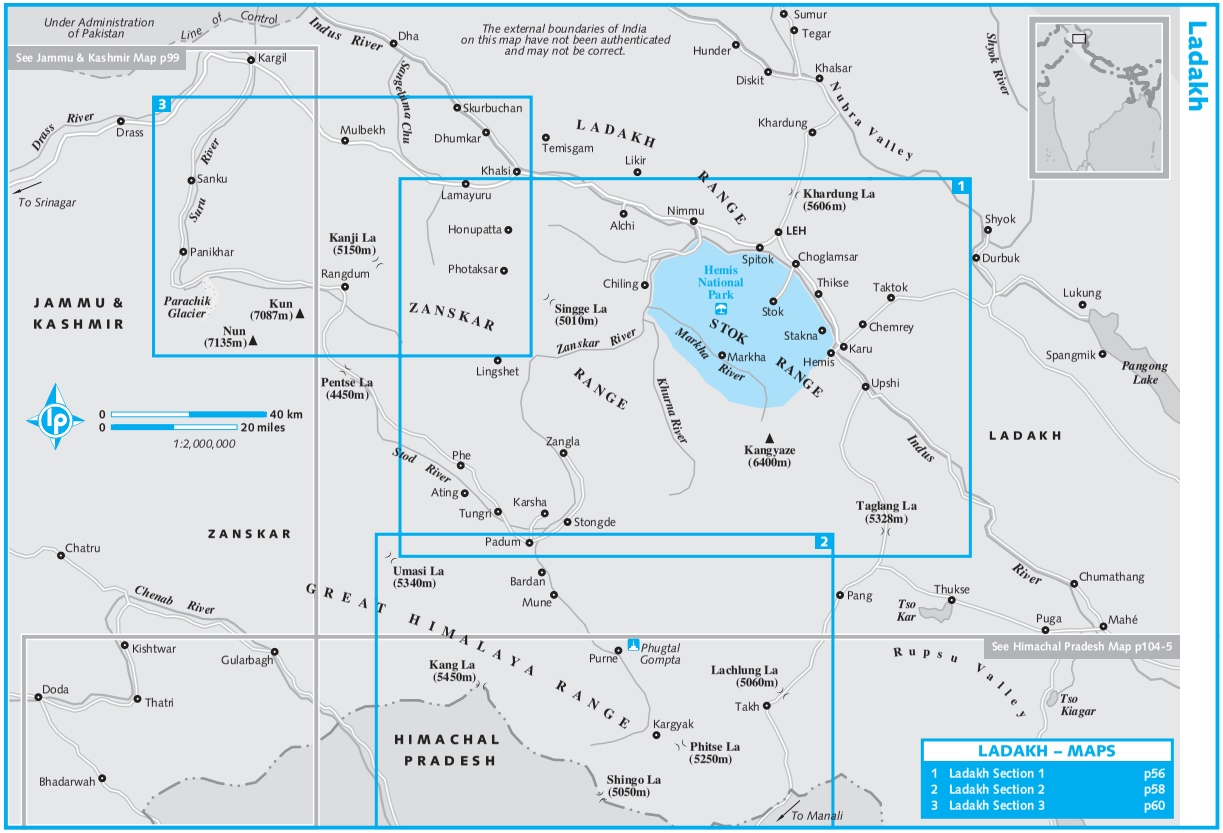
Ladakh is also the highest region in India, with elevations rarely below 3000m and often above 3500m. This, and its northerly inland location, ensures extremely cold temperatures. In winter, the daytime temperatures are seldom above freezing. The maximum daytime temperatures in Leh are around -3°C in January, while at night they can fall to -15°C. In spring, temperatures begin to rise, and by early summer they reach the mid 20°Cs.

By autumn (early-Sep to mid-Oct), day temperatures fall to between 10°C and 15°C, while any instability caused by the Indian monsoon gives way to settled conditions. Towards the end of October, there is usually one significant pre-winter storm lasting two or three days, while the first of the heavy winter snows fall in December.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trekking season extends from early June to late October. In July, the combination of a late spring snowmelt and the



lonelyplanet.com

occasional monsoon downpour may cause river levels to rise and make trekking difficult, particularly in the remote gorges. Storms in July and August are not uncommon and snowfalls can occur on the high passes throughout the season. The first of the winter snows fall by mid-October, although an unseasonal storm in September can bring a premature end to the season.

Bear in mind that the Rohtang Pass on the road linking Manali and Leh may not be open until mid-June. In the Zanskar, the snow on the Pentse La is normally cleared for vehicles until June, although it is possible to trek across the pass earlier in the season.

Maps

Refer to *Ladakh Zanskar Centre* and *Ladakh Zanskar South* sections 1:150,000 published by Olizane. The coloured sections with 1000m contours are the best available. Refer also to the Leomann 1:200,000 series and US military U502 1:250,000 series for planning and trekking. See the Planning section for each trek for details of specific map requirements.

Note that Leomann's Ladakh sheets do not meet up with their Himachal ones! Fortunately, the gaps in the Himalaya Range are irrelevant to most of the treks in this chapter.

BUYING MAPS

The Olizane map sections can be purchased in Leh, although at around Rs 1000 to Rs 1200 per section they are by no means inexpensive. Some of the Leomann series can also be purchased in Leh, although the US military series is not available and must be purchased prior to arriving in India. However, copies of the Nelles Verlag 1:350,000 *Ladakh & Zanskar* and a number of locally published trekking maps of Ladakh can be purchased in Leh for Rs 200 each. Although neither has as much detail as the larger-scale sections, they at least cover all the main trails across Ladakh.

Place Names

The transliteration of Ladakhi names has meant that place names in guidebooks and brochures are often spelt in a number of ways. For example, the famous gompa at Thikse is also known as Tiksey or Thiksey. Similarly, the southern region of Ladakh is referred to as Zanskar, Zangskar and Zaskar. Generally, if the place sounds the same then it is the same.

Books

There are all number of coffee-table books on Ladakh. One of the best is *Ladakh* by Heinrich Harrer. If you can extend your budget, *Ladakh* by Prahir Purkayastha is a work of art. For background on Ladakh refer to *Ladakh: Crossroads of High Asia* and *Himalayan Caravans* both by Janet Rizvi, and *The Cultural History of Ladakh* by David L Snellgrove and Tadeusz Skorupski. *Ancient Futures* by Helena Norberg-Hodge is a highly acclaimed review of the impact of developments in Ladakh, while *A Journey into Ladakh* by Andrew Harvey describes the author's peregrinations through Ladakh in the 1980s. *No Purdah in Padum* by Antonia Deacock is an account of a pioneering trek across Zanskar in 1958 that was covered 20 years later by Michel Peissel in *Zanskar – the Hidden Kingdom*. Nineteenth-century tomes that are still available as reprints in Delhi include Alexandra Cunningham's *Ladakh*, Thomas Thomson's *West Himalaya & Tibet*, and AH Franke's *The History of Ladakh*.

Permits & Regulations

In order to trek in the Hemis National Park you need a permit that is issued on the first stage of your trek at the *dhaba* (tea stall) below the village of Rumbak. The permit costs Rs 100 for foreigners and Rs 20 for Indian trekkers.

Although there are no requirements to obtain a permit for any of the treks described in this chapter, permits are required to visit some of the outlying regions of Ladakh including Rupsu, the Nubra Valley and Pangong Lake. By far the easiest way to obtain a permit is to get a local travel agent to do it for you. Permits are valid for seven days and you're required to travel in a group of four, though travel agents can get around this with a bit of creative paperwork. Its possible to obtain a permit and travel independently, although the Indo Tibetan border police (ITBP) have been known to turn back independent travellers who are not part of an organised group.

LEH & THE INDUS VALLEY

Leh and the upper Indus Valley is the cultural heart of Ladakh, a region often referred to as 'Little Tibet' on account of the cultural similarities between the upper Indus Valley and Tibet. As soon as you arrive you are in the midst of the mountains. Immediately south of the Indus are the 6000m peaks of the Stok Kangri Range while to the north the drier but equally impressive Ladakh Range looms above the town of Leh. The ease of arrangements as well as the short time it takes to get on the trail is an incentive to trek even for a few days. This reflects a trend that has resulted in Leh and the Indus Valley being India's most popular trekking destination.

HISTORY

The trails alongside the Indus Valley have been regularly followed by Buddhist pilgrims en route to the source of the Ganges and the sacred summit of Kailas in Tibet. The trails beyond Lamayuru and Leh were also explored although it was not until the coming of the Mons (Buddhist missionaries from India) that settlements were established, while successive migrations from lower down the Indus Valley facilitated the introduction of irrigation.

FLORA & FAUNA

While trekking across the trans-Himalayan region of Ladakh, you may spot *bharal* grazing the high ridges. **Ibex** or **urial** may also be seen from a distance in the more sheltered valleys. The best time to view these species is October. Schedule time in the vicinity of the high passes (for *bharal*) and in the remote valleys (for ibex and urial).

If you have ambitions to see a **snow leopard**, Ladakh and the Zanskar have the largest concentration in the West Himalaya. However, you will need plenty of time and luck! In the early 1990s, two eminent naturalists from Delhi spent two winters in Ladakh before recording their first photos of the snow leopard at the head of the Markha Valley. Equally as elusive is the **lynx**, with a short tail and black-tipped ears, which also preys on *bharal*.

In early winter, packs of **wolves** may be heard (but seldom seen) near the villages, perhaps searching for a domestic yak that has strayed from the safety of the herd. **Wild yaks** are found in the vast open plateaus of Chang-chenmo, while **kiang** are found in the remote regions of Rupshu and Changtang.

Brown bears may be sighted in the remote valleys in the vicinity of Rangdum and areas of the Zanskar Valley. This is also the habitat of **marmots** whose shrill whistles alert other wildlife when danger approaches.

The birdlife of Ladakh includes many species that migrate from the Indian subcontinent to central Asia in the summer. They include **black-necked cranes**, which breed in the lakes of eastern Ladakh. The **citrine wagtail** is another summer visitor, as is the **horned lark**, which is attracted to the vast high-altitude meadows. Large flocks of **grandala** also favour high-altitude meadows, as do **streaked** and **great rosefinches** and **common ravens**.

Tibetan partridges, **snowcocks** and **chukars** can be found in the scant high-altitude undergrowth. This is also the habitat of **lammergeiers**, while **golden eagles** prey on marmots, pikas and even small goats. **Himalayan griffons**, with their distinctive upturned wings, may be seen searching for prey high above the scant pastures, a habitat shared by another bird of prey – the **merlin**. **Tibetan snowfinches** and **black-billed magpies** are common in the villages of Ladakh, while **white-tailed rubycoats** are found alongside the mountain streams.

The wetter regions of Ladakh are to the immediate west of the Himalaya Range. Here there is an abundance of flowering plants, including a variety of **geraniums**, **aquilegias** and **lousewarts**. The forested regions are confined to the remote valleys where **willows**, **poplars** and **rose bushes** thrive at altitudes between 3000m and 3500m. This also provides a natural haven for wildlife, although the low rainfall prevents a wide range of wildflowers growing. Heading north, the meagre rainfall peters out and the flowering plants are mostly confined to the banks of irrigation channels.

The establishment of monasteries and settlements both in and beyond the Indus Valley was evidenced by Alchi in the 11th century and later by the monasteries of Tikse, Spituk and Likir in the 15th century at a time when the Gelukpa order spread its teaching from Tibet to Ladakh. Monasteries such as Hemis were founded by the Kings or Drukpa order in the 17th century and it is probable that the tiny gompas at Markha and Skiu in the Markha Valley were also established at this time.

ENVIRONMENT

The region's main mountains are the Ladakh, Stok and Zanskar Ranges. Another major feature is the Hemis National Park, stretching from the south banks of the Indus Valley across to the Markha Valley and east to the Zanskar River.

There are many areas beyond the villages where the willow and bush provide a haven for birdlife. Many are migratory in nature, moving from higher slopes to lower according to the season. The black-billed magpie is a common visitor to the villages. Birds of prey, including the lammergeier, soar above the highest pastures.

See the Flora & Fauna boxed text on the previous page for more details.

ACCESS TOWN

Leh (p94) is the only access town for this region. Most trekkers undertaking a trek out of the Indus Valley spend some time in Leh, the capital of Ladakh before heading off on the trail. Whether flying into Leh or arriving by road three or four days are essential, for at 3500m the air is thin and there is a necessity to acclimatise while undertaking your preparations.

STOK CIRCUIT

Duration 5 days
Distance 47km
Difficulty moderate
Start Spitok/Zinchen
Finish Stok
Nearest Town Leh
Transport bus
Summary A fine introductory trek in Ladakh, traversing the Stok Range.

If time is at a premium then this five-day trek will provide a great introduction to trekking in Ladakh. It includes a traverse of the Stok La and a sample of Buddhist villages, and ancient gompas and chortens, as well as dramatic views of the Stok and Ladakh Ranges. As on all treks in Ladakh, sound acclimatisation is essential and needs to be factored in to the initial stages of the trek.

PLANNING

When to Trek

This trek can be undertaken from early June to mid-October.

What to Bring

You will need a tent when camping at the base of the Stok Pass. There is the possibility of a Ladakhi homestay at Rumbak village or on other nights staying in one of the parachute tents that double as a tea house during the day. Whichever option you select, ensure you have a good sleeping bag and sleeping mat. If camping, bring a supply of food, a stove and sufficient kerosene for at least two days on the trek.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 Sheet 3 *Leh, Zanskar & Nubra Valley*. Also refer to Nelles Verlag 1:350,000 *Ladakh & Zanskar sheet* and the US military U502 series 1:250,000 maps *NI 43-08 ref Leh* and *43-12 ref Martselang*. Also refer to the *Ladakh/Zanskar (Centre)* trek section 1:150,000 published by Olizane.

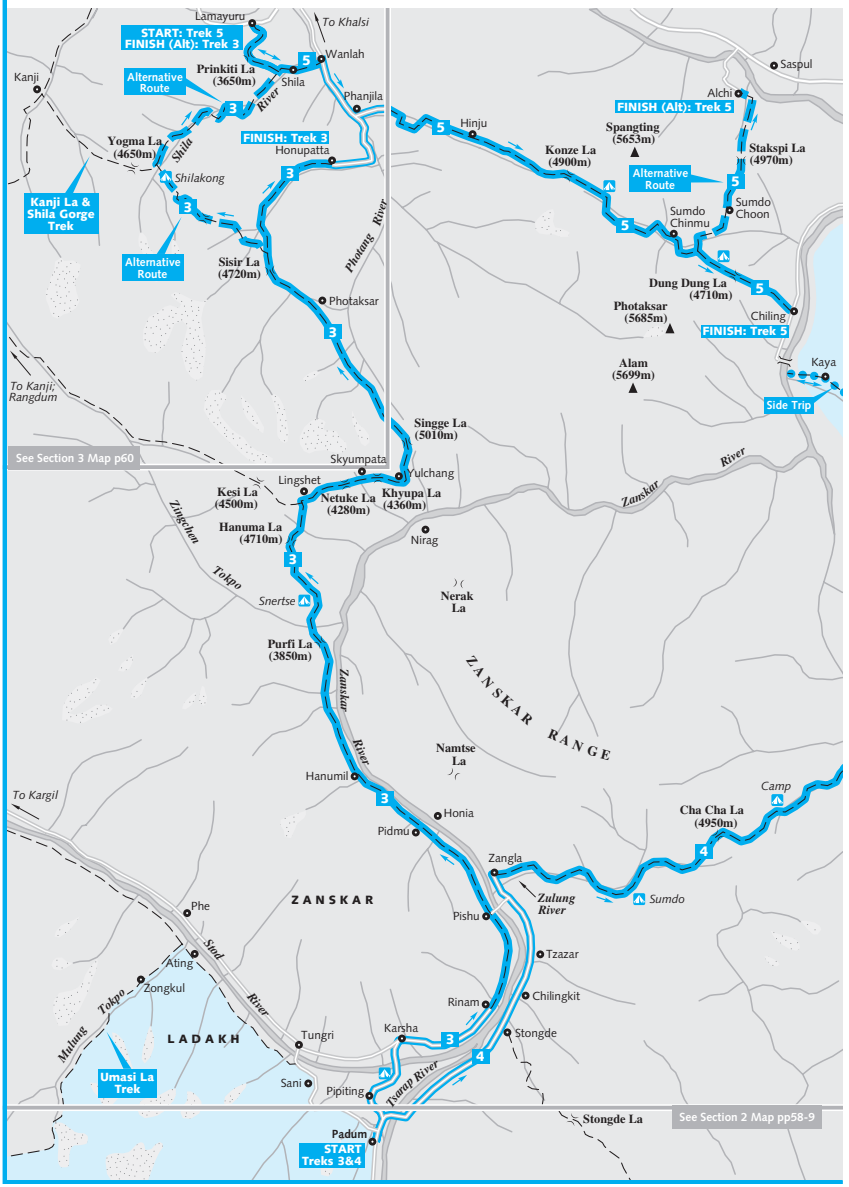
Permits & Regulations

The trek goes into the Hemis National Park. A fee of Rs 100 per day per person is collected at the parachute tent just below Rumbak village.

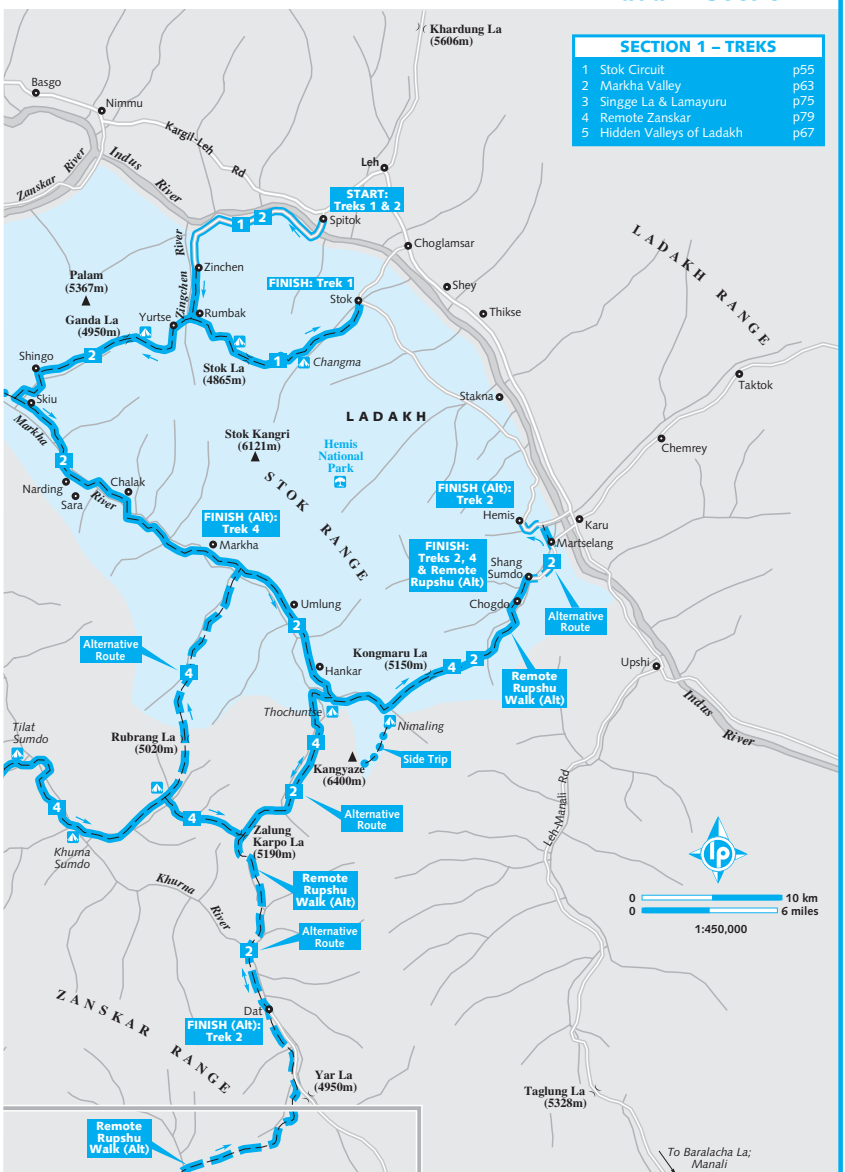
Accommodation

At Zinchen there is a choice of campsites and the possibility of staying in a parachute tent. In Rumbak there are many houses that offer overnight homestay accommodation. At the base of the pass there is nothing, while at Changmar on the east side of the Stok La, there is a parachute tent. There are plenty of campsites in the villages where you can expect to pay around Rs 100 per night to pitch your tent.

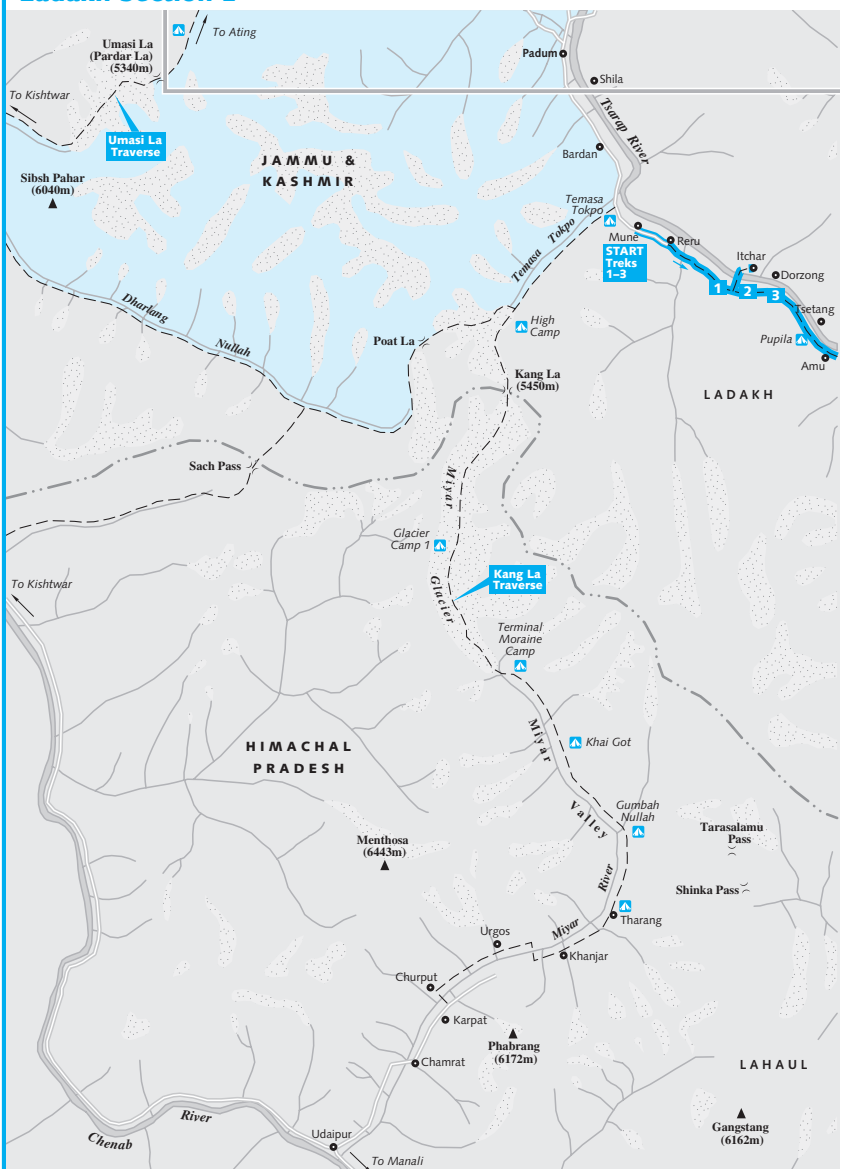
Ladakh Section 1

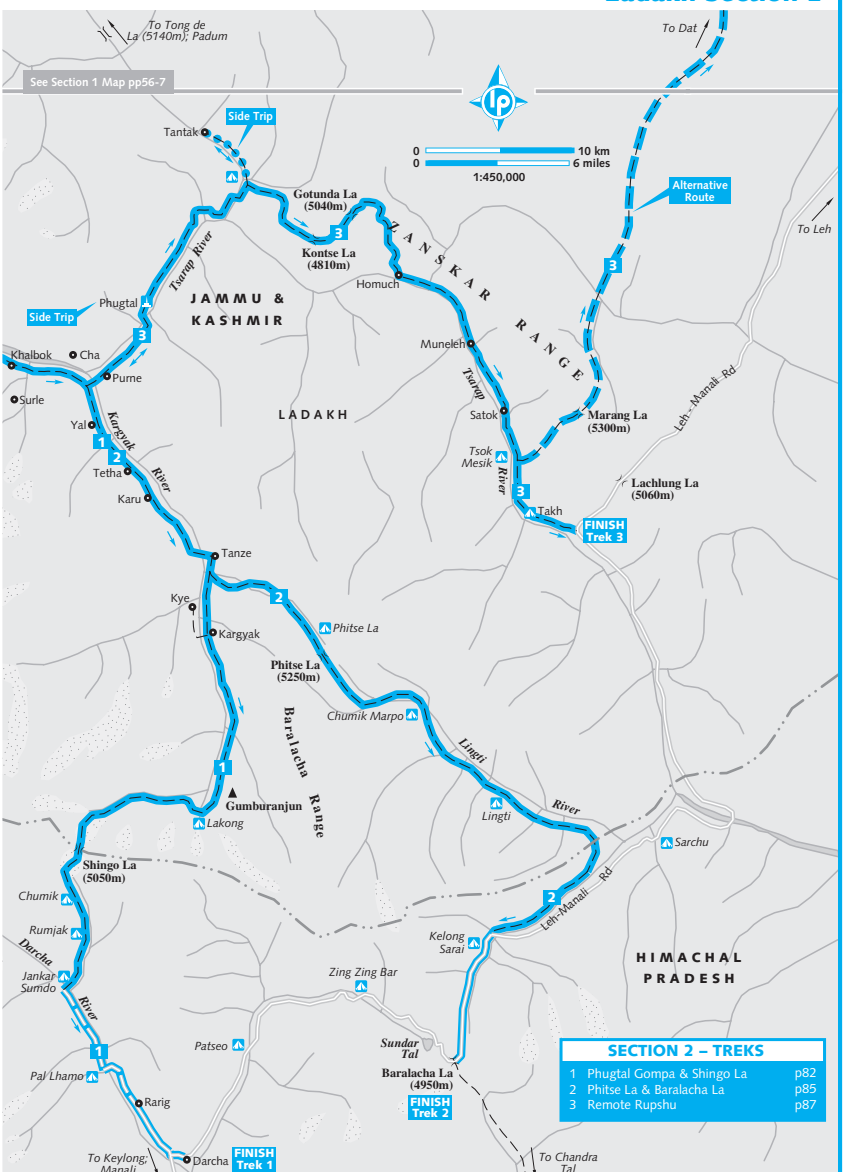


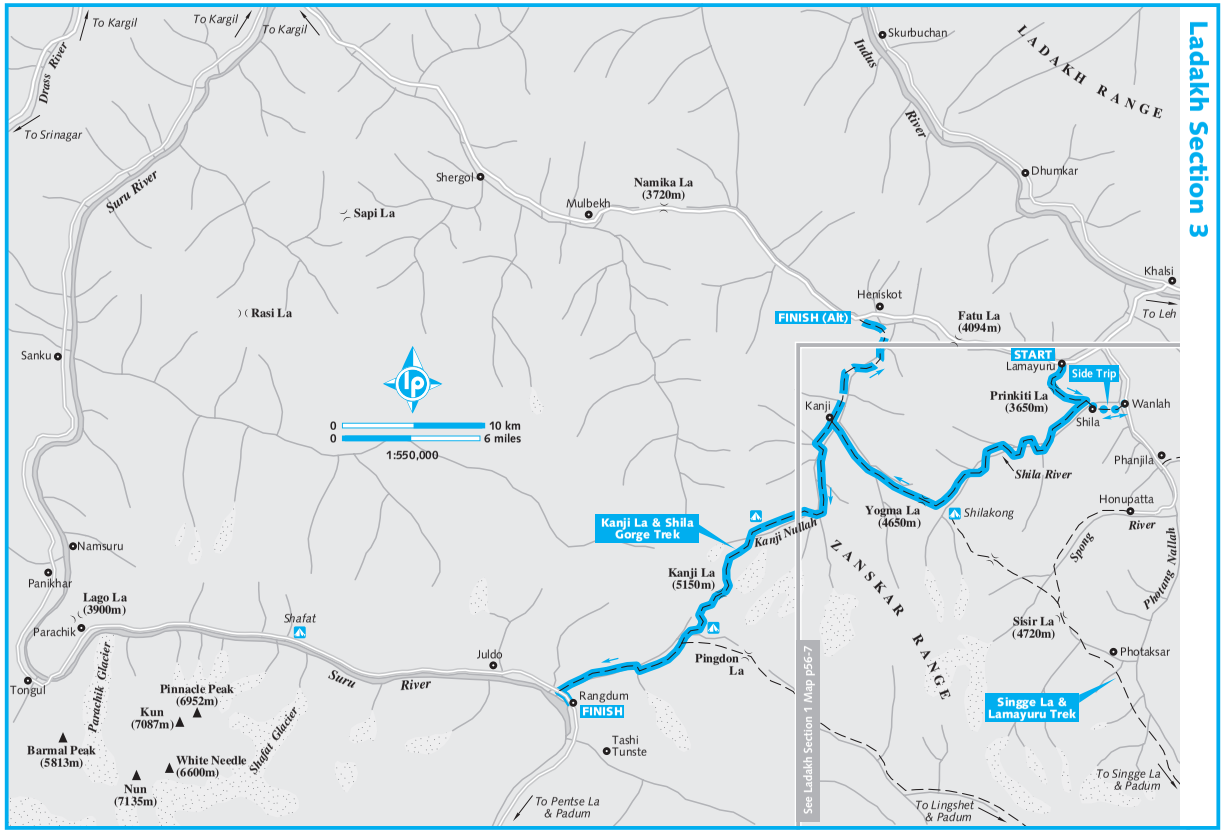
Ladakh Section 1



Ladakh Section 2




Ladakh Section 2
To Tong de La (5140m); Padum
To Dat
See Section 1 Map pp56-7
Side Trip
Tantak
0 10 km
0 6 miles
1:450,000
Alternative Route
To Leh
Gotunda La (5040m)
Kontse La (4810m)
LANSKAR RANGE
Tsarap River
Homuch
Phugtal
Side Trip
JAMMU & KASHMIR
Khalbok
Cha
Purne
Surle
Yal
Kargyak River
Tetha
Karu
LADAKH
Muneleh
Tsarap River
Satok
Marang La (5300m)
Leh-Manali Rd
Tsok Mesik
Takh
FINISH Trek 3
Lachlung La (5060m)
Tanze
Kye
Kargyak
Phitse La
Phitse La (5250m)
Chumik Marpo
Baralacha Range
Lingti River
Lingti
Gumburanjun
Lakong
Sarchu
Shingo La (5050m)
Chumik
Rumjak
Darcha
Jankar Sumdo
Kelong Sarai
Leh-Manali Rd
HIMACHAL PRADESH
Zing Zing Bar
Patseo
Sundar Tal
Baralacha La (4950m)
FINISH Trek 2
Pal Lhamo
Rarig
To Keylong; Manali
Darcha
FINISH Trek 1
To Chandra Tal
SECTION 2 – TREKS
1 Phugtal Gompa & Shingo La p82
2 Phitse La & Baralacha La p85
3 Remote Rupshu p87


Ladakh Section 3
To Kargil
To Kargil
To Kargil
Drass River
To Srinagar
Suru River
Sapi La
Shergol
Mulbekh
Namika La (3720m)
Skurbuchan
Indus River
LADAKH RANGE
Dhumkar
Khalsi
To Leh
Henskot
FINISH (Alt)
Fatu La (4094m)
Rasi La
Sanku
0 10 km
0 6 miles
1:550,000
START
Lamayuru
Side Trip
Prinkiti La (3650m)
Wanlah
Shila
Kanji
Phanjila
Shila River
Honupatta
Yogma La (4650m)
Shilakong
Spong
Phyang Nullah
River
Kanji La & Shila Gorge Trek
Kanji Nullah
Kanji La (5150m)
ZANSKAR RANGE
Namsuru
Panikhar
Lago La (3900m)
Parachik
Shafat
Sisir La (4720m)
Photaksar
Pingdon La
Juldo
Tongul
Pinnacle Peak (6952m)
Kun (7087m)
Suru River
Rangdum
FINISH
Singge La & Lamayuru Trek
Parachik Glacier
Barmal Peak (5813m)
White Needle (6600m)
Shafat Glacier
Nun (7135m)
Tashi Tunste
To Singge La & Padum
To Pentse La & Padum
To Lingshet & Padum
See Ladakh Section 1 Map p56-7

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

There are bus services to Spitok (Rs 30, one hour). Some trekkers elect to take the bus from Leh direct to Zinchen (Rs 30, 1½ hours, three times a week), and head to Rumbak the same day if they are sufficiently acclimatised. From Stok the last bus (Rs 30) leaves at around 3pm. It takes one hour to return to Leh.

THE TREK (see map p56–7)

Day 1: Spitok to Zinchen

4–5 hours, 15km

By no means the most exhilarating day on the trail. An early start is imperative as there is no shade along the south banks of the Indus River until you enter the Zinchen Gorge.

After visiting the nearby Spitok gompa, continue to the established stopping point for loading mules close to the bridge (3290m) over the Indus and head west through the outlying village. Here the reality of the first day becomes apparent – following a dirt road along the south bank of the Indus. It's a question of putting your head down and striding ahead and accepting that exercise will assist acclimatisation. After 4km there are views down the Indus Valley and across to the village of Phe. It's a further 7km to the confluence of the Indus and the Zinchen River. The trail turns south and there are options to take a break in the shade of one of the willow trees alongside the river. The track crosses a road bridge to the true left, or west side of the gorge, and continues for a further 4km to the settlement of **Zinchen**.

There is a choice of campsites. The first is located just below the settlement. About 1km up the gorge is a small wooden bridge over the stream. Cross the bridge and camp (3380m) in the shade of the poplar trees.

Day 2: Zinchen to Rumbak

3–4 hours, 9km

A short stage up an impressive gorge with tantalising views of the snow-capped peaks beyond Rumbak. It is also a necessity for acclimatisation before crossing the Stok La.

From Zinchen recross the stream and continue for 1km on the true left of the gorge. The trail then heads to the opposite bank over a less than secure wooden bridge for a few hundred metres before returning to the true left. This time there is no bridge, and wet boots are the order of the stage. Continue up the left bank following a trail that winds above the river for 3km before recrossing the river that involves boulder hopping. The trail then leads up to the confluence of the Zinchen Chu and a stream flowing in from the east. There is also a substantial stone enclosure for poplar trees that are used by villagers from Zinchen for construction. This is about the halfway point to Rumbak

The trail continues on the true right for 2km before recrossing a bridge over the river and leading up to a small sacred area marked by Buddhist prayer flags. Opposite, high in the cliffs is Eagles Nest, while directly above the prayer flags there is evidence of a small spring line. There is one last crossing on a good bridge before the final ascent to the outlying fields of lower Rumbak village, while high above are the snow-capped ridges extending from the Stok Range

There is a welcome *dhaba* and a substantial campsite (3850m), convenient if heading onto the Markha Valley trek (see p63). Alternatively head up the side valley for a further 1km (20 minutes) to **Rumbak** village (3960m). The village comprises 10 to 12 two-storied, well-maintained whitewashed houses amid fields of barley and mustard. Prayer flags vie for position with solar panels on the roofs of the houses.

Day 3: Rumbak to Stok La Base

3–4 hours, 5km

Another short but rewarding stage following a well-defined trail leading from Rumbak village to the base of the Stok La. The route takes in views that extend across the scant grazing lands and the high windswept ridges that enclose the Rumbak Valley.

From Rumbak village follow a trail that heads to the far true right of the valley. As the valley opens out the location of the Stok La – the lowest point on the long serrated ridge to the east enclosing the upper valley – can be appreciated. If your eyesight is good enough you may also be able to pick out the switchbacks just below the pass as well as the prayer flags on the summit.

The well-marked trail gradually ascends above the village past a potential campsite

after about 2km (useful if trekking from Stok). The trail remains on the north side of the valley leading through scant vegetation to the base of the **Stok La** (4380m). The campsite consists of few comforts unless you revel in sleeping on small rocks and gravel. However, the spectacular location compensates. Immediately above is the high ridge above the Stok La while there are views back down the valley across to the elevated grazing pastures and the impressive ridges beyond Rumbak.

Day 4: Base Stok La to Changma via Stok La

4–5 hours, 10km

The ascent to the Stok La is rewarded with panoramic views that extend north to the snow-capped Ladakh Range and to the distant peaks that form the East Karakoram. Just beyond the pass, the efforts of the day are further rewarded with a bird's-eye view down to the Indus Valley and the settlements 1300m below.

This is a stage for taking 'sherpa steps', plenty of short steps and deep breaths, as the approach to the pass is undeniably steep. From camp the trail winds high above the dry valley to the north to reach at base at 4730m. This marks the beginning of the steep switchbacks to the pass. Allow two to three hours to reach the pass. The views that extend all the way back down to Rumbak village compensate. The **Stok La** (Naming La; 4865m) is a double pass. Keep on the high trail to access the second pass (4827m) that takes around 10 to 15 minutes to reach. From the crest of the second pass there are views down to Doksar – literally a high grazing area – where villagers from Stok tend to their sheep and goats in the summer. It will take the best part of an hour to descend steeply to Doksar (4540m) where there is a spring line and a convenient campsite.

Head on down the gorge for a further 3km to **Changma** (4080m) where there is a *dhaba* and campsite that is frequently used by groups ascending to the Stok Kangri Base camp.

Day 5: Changma to Stok

2 hours, 8km

A short stage that allows time to visit the Stok Palace museum before returning to Leh

The trail leads down the true left of the gorge to reach a boulder-strewn riverbed, the result of a flood in August 2005 that wiped out most of the trail down to Stok. To avoid river crossings necessitates a short steep climb above the river for about an hour, or 3km, after leaving camp. Soon after, it joins a well-marked trail that descends gradually through an open valley to the outskirts of Stok village. Views of the **Ladakh Range** provide a familiar backdrop. There are a number of *dhabas* at the trail head (3630m) where the bus to Leh turns around. Continue for 20 to 30 minutes down the road to Stok Palace (3507m). There is also a well-maintained campsite amid ancient poplars just opposite the palace if heading down directly from the Stok La in one stage.

The Stok Palace was built in 1836 after the King of Ladakh was exiled from Leh by the Dogra army led by Zorawar Singh. There is a well-maintained museum in the palace with displays of the royal families' heritage as well as a stuffed snow leopard.

DONKEY DEALS

Many years ago – but still relevant today – an earnest young trekker decided to bypass local agents and mule contractors. His plan was to buy a donkey to carry his gear so that he could trek the high passes for months at a time. The young trekker travelled to Hemis and commenced negotiations. Unfortunately for him, the Ladakhi trader had 'seen the trekker coming' and sold him the most stubborn donkey this side of the Indus Valley, for a somewhat inflated price. After camping for the night, the trekker loaded the donkey and headed off on the trail. He didn't get far. After a few frustrating hours of tugging and pulling the donkey refused to go any further. The trekker was left with no option but to return to Hemis where the donkey's former owner bought the donkey back for at a fraction of the price that he paid the previous day.

MARKHA VALLEY

Duration 7 days
Distance 111km
Difficulty moderate–demanding
Start Spitok/Zinchen
Finish Shang Sumdo/Hemis
Nearest Town Leh
Transport bus
Summary Ladakh's most popular trek, traversing the Stok Range and visiting Buddhist villages and gompas.

While this trek is popular it is by no means easy. There are two pass crossings in the vicinity of 5000m and several nights camping at high altitude. Good acclimatisation is the key to a successful trek.

Once into the Markha Valley take in the whitewashed settlements, ancient gompas and *mani* walls reflecting an abiding Buddhist culture. Consider also that within a generation there is every possibility that a road will be constructed up the Markha Valley that will enable the villagers to reach Leh and the Indus Valley in a matter of hours.

The trek can be shortened by driving directly to Zinchen (Day 1). It can also be extended by walking along the dirt road from Shang Sumdo (Day 7) and then following a trail around to the Hemis gompa.

PLANNING

When to Trek

This trek can be undertaken from early June to mid-October.

What to Bring

Whether you bring a tent depends on your choice of overnight shelter. Whichever option you select, ensure you have a good sleeping bag and sleeping mat. If camping, bring a supply of food, a stove and sufficient kerosene for the entire trek.

Maps

Refer to the *Ladakh/Zanskar (Centre)* trek section 1:150,000 published by Olizane, and to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 3 Leh, Zanskar & Nubra Valley*. Also refer to Nelles Verlag 1:350,000 *Ladakh & Zanskar sheet* and the US military U502 series 1:250,000 maps *NI 43-08 ref Leh* and *43-12 ref Martselang*.

Permits & Regulations

The trek goes into the Hemis National Park. A fee of Rs 100 per day per person is collected at the parachute tent just below Rumbak village.

Accommodation

Himalayan Homestays (www.himalayan-homestays.com) organises homestays in some of the villages. A single/double will set you back around Rs 350/600. To book contact **Snow Leopard Trails** (☎ 01982-252074) in the Hotel Kanglachen Complex in Leh. The stays extend to most villages on the trek, however, for the time being there is no village and therefore no accommodation at Nimaling – the highest and, weatherwise, the most exposed overnight on the trek.

Parachute tents are available in most of the villages, including Rumbak, Shingo, Skiu, Markha, Hankar, Nimaling and Shang Sumdo, although from mid-September to early June, many of the parachute tents are taken down.

If camping there are plenty of campsites in the villages where you can expect to pay around Rs 100 per night to pitch your tent.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

There are bus services to Spitok (Rs 30, one hour). Some trekkers elect to take the bus from Leh direct to Zinchen (Rs 40, 1½ hours, three times a week), and head to Rumbak the same day if they are sufficiently acclimatised. From Sumdo the daily bus to Leh leaves early each morning (Rs 34, two hours). There is also a daily bus from Hemis (Rs 30, 1½ to two hours)

THE TREK (see map p56–7)

Day 1: Spitok to Zinchen

4–5 hours, 15km

See Day 1 of the Stok Circuit trek (p55).

Day 2: Zinchen to Rumbak & Base of Ganda La

5–6 hours, 14km

The decision to camp at Rumbak or head straight to the base of the Ganda La on the second day will depend on acclimatisation. If trekking directly from Zinchen then it is advisable to stay at the lower base camp and make up the difference the next day. Both camps include attractive options to climb

the side ridges and gain magnificent views back down to the Indus Valley and across to the Ladakh Range.

From Zinchen trek up to **Rumbak** as far as the parachute tent (3850m), and outlying fields below Rumbak village. There is no need to go to Rumbak. Instead head up the main valley to the south. The trail initially ascends a broad glacial valley before switching to the opposite true left bank and the short ascent to the single house and fields of **Yurtse** (4160m). Beyond the settlement the gradient steepens although it should take less than an hour to reach the lower base camp (4350m). The higher camp (4550m) is a further 1km (40 minutes) up the trail leading to the **Ganda La**. Both camps have parachute tents and restricted camping sites.

If staying at the lower camp there is the option to head north towards a series of rock cairns clearly visible from camp. From the cairns there is a short, steep ascent to a ridge leading to a vantage point from where you gain a bird's-eye view of Rumbak, the route to the Stok La as well as views to the Indus Valley and the gompa at Phe. **Stok Kangri** (6121m) dominates the views to the east while there are also sweeping views to the south and the route leading to the Ganda La.

If staying at the high camp ascend the trail leading towards the Ganda La for a further 1km before heading north along the ridge that provides equally impressive views back down the Zinchen Gorge as well as a 180-degree view of the scant pastures high above the main trail followed earlier in the day. Bear in mind that this valley is the 'snow leopard capital of the Himalaya', a suitable incentive to scan the highest ridges where the elusive cat silently roams throughout the summer.

Day 3: Base of Ganda La to Skiu via Ganda La

6–8 hours, 24km

A big day and if this is your first pass crossing in the Himalaya you will be impressed. If time is not at a premium also consider shortening the day and camping at Shingo. From the Ganda La there are views north to the Ladakh Range while to the south the rugged folds of the Zanskar Range extend to the snow-capped peaks of the Himalaya.

Clear views from the pass necessitate an early start. From the lower camp it is 40 minutes to the high camp directly up the valley to the south. The trail then leads to the east heading up to a series of meadows carpeted in wildflowers as soon as the winter snows melt by late June. There follows a short steep ascent up a series of switchbacks to a ridge marking the approach to the pass. Allow anywhere between two and four hours to reach the pass depending on fitness and ability to adjust to the altitude.

From the **Ganda La** (4950m) savour the panoramic views before heading down steeply at first before a long, gradual descent to the settlement of **Shingo** (4150 m). Look out for large colonies of marmots on the way down. The time from the pass to the village is around two hours.

Rest at the parachute tent before descending through the village and outlying fields for a further 1km to the campsite at Shingo. The trail then enters a tight gorge leading through willow thickets and crossing the stream a number of times. Rose bushes are abundant and in full bloom in July and August. Also keep an eye out for *bharal* on the almost barren ridges above the gorge. Just above the confluence of the Shingo Gorge and the Markha Valley there are a number of ancient chortens, while the gompa (renovated in the 1990s with the aid of trekkers' donations), like all the gompas elsewhere in the Markha Valley, is affiliated with the Hemis gompa. Time from **Shingo** to **Skiu** (3435m) is around two to 2½ hours.

There is a shady campsite alongside the Markha River as well as a number of parachute tents. Alternative campsites and Homestays are also available about 1km further up the Markha Valley.

SIDE TRIP: ZANSKAR GORGE

4–5 hours, 12km return

If you can afford a rest day, this is a worthwhile diversion. From Skiu the route leads down the true right of the valley through the settlement of **Kaya** (3350m), complete with apricot orchards and a tiny village gompa. Beyond the village, the trail continues down the Markha Valley to the confluence of the **Zanskar River**. The confluence is marked by a small chorten from where you can appreciate the scale of the Zanskar Gorge.

A road will eventually be built along this section linking the villages of the Markha Valley to Chiling and the Indus Valley.

Day 4: Skiu to Markha

6–7 hours, 20km

Until the road is built up the Markha Valley, the trails linking the villages and settlements are still as attractive as when they were first opened up for trekkers over 30 years ago. En route there is an abundance of willow thickets and poplars where ancient *mani* walls and chortens line the trail and barren cliffs rise high above the valley.

From **Skiu** head east up the Markha Valley. After 2km the trail winds high above the riverbed. Floods in 2005 wiped out most of the then existing trails. There are a number of tiring 50m ascents and descents before the trail reaches a side gorge and potential campsite about 3km above Skiu. There is a *dhaba* selling buckthorn juice and locally made wheat biscuits run by the Women's Association of Ladakh.

A kilometre beyond the confluence fill your water bottles from an abundant spring **line** with the best mineral water in Ladakh. The trail continues through a series of willow and gorse thickets to a bridge over the Markha River. Cross to the true left – south side of the valley – and continue for a further 2km to a clearing known as **Narding** (3540m) with a parachute tent and another spring line. The tiny settlement of **Sara** (3560m) is about 3km up the valley with a well-maintained campsite. Continue for 1km to a bridge, re-crossing the Markha River to **Chalak** (3610m) set amid abundant barley fields.

There follows a steady ascent to an impressive line of chortens and *mani* walls set high above the river with exceptional views up the valley. Just beyond this vantage point is a side gorge and an impressive mound of *bharal* horns that act as a protector to the valley.

The well-defined trail continues for 2km to where the valley widens and the river braids. There is no bridge so wet boots are in order before completing the final 3km to Markha village. There are a number of campsites in the vicinity of the village including an established tea house and camp just before the final bridge crossing to the main village.

Markha (3770m) consists of about 25 houses and is by far the biggest village in the valley. Well before reaching the village the silhouette of a dilapidated fort can be seen. The fort dates back to the 1830s and the time of the invasion of the Dogra army under Zorawar Singh. Immediately to the north of the fort is a gompa that is in the process of being renovated. Like for Skiu, the caretaker monk comes from Hemis where he completes a three-year term of duty.

Day 5: Markha to Thochuntse

4–5 hours, 13km

A further stage to appreciate the village culture of the Markha Valley as well as gaining glimpses of the imposing peak of Kangyaze (6400m) looming above the Nimaling Plains.

Follow the trail through Markha village and continue on the true right side of the valley for 2km. Cross the Markha River here – no bridge and wet boots – before continuing for a further 1km and recrossing the river again. Take care if crossing later in the day as the water level can rise considerably with the snowmelt. Also note that just before the second crossing is a side gorge that defines the route to the **Rubrang La** that meets up with the trail on the Remote Zanskar trek (see p79) After the second crossing continue to the base of Umlung gompa and continue along the river bank to the solitary house and parachute tent at **Umlung** (3870m). Just beyond the settlement the trail ascends high above the river before re-following the river bed, with the first views of **Kangyaze** (6400m) rising high above the Nimaling plains.

The trail then skirts around another side gorge from where the houses and fields of lower Hankar can be seen about 2km up the valley. Here there is no shortage of parachute tents and a couple of comfortable campsites. After ascending a steep side gully you reach the main village of **Hankar** (3980m) set beneath a dilapidated fort that also dates back to the times of Zorawar Singh in the 1830s.

One kilometre beyond the village, the trail splits. The valley to the south leads to the **Zalung Karpo La** (see alternative route). The trail to Thochuntse follows the main tributary that flows from the east. After 1km, the trail crosses a stone bridge to a series of fields owned by the villagers of Hankar and the campsite of **Thochuntse** (4150m).

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: HANKAR TO DAT VIA ZALUNG KARPO LA

3 days, 46km

An attractive alternative to the popular Markha Valley trek that ascends to the wild, desolate settlements of the **Rupshu** region. From Hankar cross the bridge just above the confluence of the Markha River and the river flowing from the south and gradually ascend the scant grazing pastures – with many *bharal* sightings. There are a few river crossings to reach the base (4680m) of the Zalung Karpo La. Allow around five to six hours. On the second day cross the **Zalung Karpo La** (5190m). The route to the pass is not easy to follow so keep an eye out for rock cairns. The final approach is also steep before affording views of the snow-capped peaks above Nimaling just below the pass.

The Zalung Karpo La is a double pass with the approach to the north leading to the Remote Zanskar trek (see p79). The route to Rupshu heads east with an steep descent before following a trail through gorges and across scant meadows to complete the six-hour stage to Tsokra (4200m), a settlement occasionally used by yak herders from Dat. On the third day enter a dramatic gorge for 4km to the confluence of the stream flowing from the east. Turn up the side valley and continue for four hours past ancient *mani* walls and across open meadows enclosed by barren ridges to the settlement of **Dat** (4340m). Dat is one of the largest settlements in Rupshu, although during the summer it is practically deserted as the villagers have taken their yaks to higher pastures. Kiang – the Tibetan wild ass can be seen in the valley above Dat.

A taxi must be organised from Leh as there is no public transport. If transport is not pre-booked then be prepared to wait for a day or two until a truck delivers supplies to the settlement and nearby gompa.

Day 6: Thochuntse to Nimaling

2½–3 hours, 7km

The trek up to the high plains of Nimaling can be completed in a short morning allowing time to explore the ridges and yak-herders' settlements in the vicinity, set beneath the dramatic backdrop of **Kangyaze**.

Beyond **Thochuntse**, the trail steadily ascends to a series of grassy ridges before a steep gully leads to the edge of the vast Nimaling Plains. Just after the ascent there is a parachute tent and a small lake before the trail rises steadily past a series of *mani* walls and chortens, while the huge peak of Kangyaze (6400m) looms to the south.

The campsites at **Nimaling** (4730m) stretch across a large undulating plain immediately to the south of the Nimaling stream. Yak herders from Hankar live in the stone settlements during summer, leading their herds to the higher pastures each day until the beginning of September when they return down to the Markha Valley. Remember that inclement weather can build quickly in this area and snowfalls are not uncommon in July and August so it is important to check that a parachute tent is in place if you are not carrying a tent.

SIDE TRIP: KANGYAZE BASE

4–5 hours, 8km return

From Nimaling, there is a fine opportunity to trek towards the base of **Kangyaze** and gain further views across the **Zanskar Range**. From camp, head south and across a series of yak-grazing pastures. While there is no established trail, it is easy to follow the lie of the land that ascends about 300m to the snowfields at the base of the peak.

Day 7: Nimaling to Shang Sumdo via Kongmaru La

6–7 hours, 18km

A relatively demanding stage traversing the Kongmaru La, the highest pass on the trek. It also affords magnificent views that extend south to the peak of Kangyaze and the snow-capped ridges that stretch to the Zanskar Range, while to the north is the Ladakh Range and the route down to the Indus Valley 1500m below.

From **Nimaling**, the trail leading to the Kongmaru La is visible. From camp, cross the stream before ascending the ridge to the north, which heads to the base of the pass. The short steep ascent to the pass is rewarded with fine views to Kangyaze. Trekking from camp to the pass should require no more than two hours – although a fit local guide will take no more than an hour.

The **Kongmaru La** (5150m) is defined by many colourful Buddhist prayer flags that are replaced at the start of each season.

Bharal may also be seen in the vicinity of the pass. There is a steep 500m descent to a small shepherd encampment and shelter for trekkers coming from Shang Sumdo and Hemis.

The trail enters a narrow gorge, crossing the main stream on several occasions as it drops steeply. The Ladakh Hill Council are at present trying to build a new trail high above the stream as it is subject to flooding after heavy rainfall. After one to 1½ hours the gorge widens. There is a parachute tent and campsite (again suitable if trekking in the opposite direction) before you continue on down to **Chogdo** (4000m). From the settlement it is a further 3km down a well-marked trail on the true left of the valley that winds high above the riverbed and on down to **Shang Sumdo** (3730m). There are a number of campsites and parachute tents close to the trail head. **Shang gompa** is located 1km up the side valley.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: SHANG SUMDO TO HEMIS

3 hours, 10km

Follow the dirt road on down the Sumdo Gorge to the outskirts of **Martselang** (3450m). Then head west past the substantial chorten and *mani* walls above the village to a side trail that cuts across the open scree slopes to **Hemis** village (3650m). Just before the village, the trail meets the road coming from the Indus Valley. It is easy to avoid the road: follow the trail leading directly up to the village.

The Hemis gompa is one of the most important in Ladakh. It is the principal gompa of the Drukpa order, and the head monk administers all the associated monasteries in the Ladakh and Zanskar regions. It was established in the 17th century under the patronage of the famous Ladakhi ruler Singge Namgyal, and since then has enjoyed the financial support of successive royal families. The gompa provides caretaker monks for the gompas at Leh, Basgo and Shey.

The annual Hemis festival attracts more than its share of local visitors and tourists. Held during the full moon in June/July, it is attended by many villagers who travel from throughout Ladakh and Zanskar. The highlight is the series of masked dances commemorating the deeds of the Buddhist figurehead Padmasambhava, the sage who introduced Tantric Buddhism to the Himalaya. Every 11 years, a huge *thangka*, one of the largest in the Tibetan world, is displayed on the walls of the Hemis courtyard.

HIDDEN VALLEYS OF LADAKH

Duration 5 days
Distance 66km
Difficulty moderate–demanding
Start Lamayuru
Finish Chiling
Nearest Town Leh
Transport bus
Summary An attractive alternative to the Markha Valley trek, crossing the high ridges of the Zanskar Range to Buddhist villages and gompas beyond the Indus Valley.

This trek follows the hidden valleys of Ladakh – beyond the confines of the Indus Valley . From the passes, savour fine views of the East Karakoram, Ladakh Range and the rugged ridges, rock spires and snow-capped peaks that define the true dimensions of the Zanskar Range.

Beyond Wanlah (Day 1), the villages are less commercial and you will need to be more self-sufficient than on the Markha Valley trek. Also consider extending the trek up the Markha Valley (see p63). This is a more straightforward option since a bridge has now been constructed over the Zanskar River just south of Chiling.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trek can be undertaken from early June until mid-October, although both the Dung Dung La and the Konze La are subject to snowfalls as early as mid-September.

What to Bring

For Days 2 to 4, a tent, sleeping bag, food and fuel supplies are necessary.

Maps

Refer to the *Ladakh/Zanskar (Centre)* trek section 1:150,000 published by Olizane and also to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 3 Leh, Zanskar & Nubra Valley* and also to

Sheet 2 Kargil, Zanskar & Nun Kun for the initial trek stages out of Lamayuru. Also refer to the Nelles Verlag 1:350,000 *Ladakh & Zanskar sheet* and to the US military U502 series 1:250,000 *NI 43-08 ref Leh*.

Accommodation

At Lamayuru, there are a number of lodges, including **Hotel Dragon** (r Rs 200-300) and **Siachen Guesthouse** (r Rs 200-300). The **Hotel Niranjana** (r from Rs 800) is run by the monastery. There is a campsite just below the road, charging Rs 100 per tent. Parachute-tent accommodation is found in the vicinity of Wanlah, Hinju, Sumdo Chinmu and Chiling. The villagers maintain the campsites and charge Rs 100 to pitch a tent for the night.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

There is a bus from Leh to Lamayuru (Rs 150, four hours). At present, there is a bus from Chiling to Leh (Rs 45, three hours), three times a week. A prearranged taxi is a convenient alternative (Rs 1700), saving you the effort of trudging down the road on the days not serviced by the bus.

THE TREK (see map p56–7)

Day 1: Lamayuru to Wanlah via Prinkiti La

3–4 hours, 11km

It is possible to bypass this stage by taking the bus directly from Khalsi to Wanlah, although acclimatisation is the all-important consideration. While the ascent over the somewhat featureless Prinkiti La is not the most exhilarating start on the first day out, the views to the jagged peaks of the Zanskar Range from the Prinkiti La compensate.

From **Lamayuru** village (3430m), head north and follow the trail leading down the valley for 1km to a large prayer flag marking the turn-off point to the east that leads up a small gorge to the Prinkiti La. The gradual ascent from Lamayuru to the pass should not take much more than an hour.

The **Prinkiti La** (3650m) affords views across the barren landscape of the Zanskar Range. From the pass the trail enters a narrow gorge, following a dry streambed down to the confluence with the Shilakong Valley. Follow the dirt road to **Shila** village (3200m) and from there it is a further 1km descent to the village and gompa of Wanlah. There is an established campsite just north of the bridge over the Wanlah River.

Wanlah gompa was established at the same time as the Lamayuru gompa and is nowadays serviced by the monks from Lamayuru. The gompa has a commanding position looking up the Shilakong Valley and the main assembly hall is open most of the day.

Wanlah village (3150m) has been connected by road with **Khalsi** (to the north in the Indus Valley) for the past decade. A bus service runs between Wanlah and Khalsi, but this is about the only transport apart from the occasional truck and the daily school bus.

LAMAYURU LEGENDS

Lamayuru is one of the oldest sites in Ladakh. Legend has it that a vast lake once filled the upper reaches of this valley. The sage Naropa miraculously breached this. The site of the breach was revered, and became the location of the gompa, which was built in the 10th century. One of the original gompas is just beyond the main assembly hall and has been recently renovated.

The gompa subscribes to one of the older Tibetan schools, the **Kargyupa** order, which was followed by the noted sages **Marpa** (1012–97) and **Milarepa** (1040–1123). For many of the outlying gompas in the region, the doctrinal distinctions are merely technical – for example, those at Wanlah, Phanjila and Khalsi, although affiliated with Lamayuru, also have close cultural links with the main Drukpa gompa at Hemis.

In recent years Lamayuru as well as a number of other gompas in Ladakh have changed their annual masked dance festival to the summer. While this may help to boost the coffers from the tourist dollar it has not been popular with the local villagers, and in particular those in the vicinity of Khalsi. Many of villagers looked forward to attending the festival during the long winter months while in the summer they are busy with the fields and cannot spare the time to attend.

Day 2: Wanlah to Hinju

4 hours, 13km

The plan is to eventually extend the road to Hinju. However, for the time being there is an opportunity to take in the tiny settlements and stands of willow trees along the watercourse as the trail winds up the lower reaches of the Hinju Valley. A further day to acclimatise before crossing the Konze La should be considered.

From the campsite cross the main bridge and follow the 4WD road along the true right bank of the valley. The trek heads up the road for around 1½ hours, or around 4km to Phanjila.

The village of **Phanjila** (3230m) is at the entrance to the Hinju Valley. It boasts a school and apricot orchards. The fields extend 2km up the valley towards Hinju. Ongoing road construction will alter the trail route and the character of the valley. For now, follow the trail on the true right of the valley through willow thickets until it enters a narrow gorge. Switch for a short distance to the opposite bank before crossing back to the true right. There are small bridges to assist with the crossings.

It is about two hours and about 5km to the settlement of lower Hinju. From there it is a further 2km up to the main village of **Hinju** (3750m) that consists of around 15 to 20 houses spread along the true left of the valley. The campsite is about 1km above the main village.

Day 3: Hinju to Camp via Konze La

6–7 hours, 15km

The approach to the Konze La affords fine views that stretch back to Hinju and beyond to the ridges of the eastern extremity of the Zanskar Range, before the dramatic descent to a serene, secluded valley.

From the camp above **Hinju**, a steady climb passes the settlement of upper Hinju and some goat enclosures. The trail then gradually winds down to the valley floor and past a lone yak-herders' encampment to the base of the pass. Continue up the valley floor for 2km before ascending a series of long switchbacks leading to the pass. The trek to the **Konze La** (4900m) from Hinju village takes three to four hours, although the time may vary considerably when the approach to the pass is under snow.

After savouring views of the peaks and ridges to the east of the pass that extend to the Dung Dung La, commence the descent over loose moraine that leads to the true left of the main valley. Once down to the valley floor, it is a short distance to the first camp (convenient if trekking in the opposite direction). The trail remains on the true left of the valley, crossing a number of side ridges before descending to a choice of campsites alongside yak-herders' huts (approximately 4500m), which are occupied in summer by villagers from Sumdo Chinmu.

Day 4: Camp to Dung Dung La Camp

3–4 hours, 12km

The settlement of Chinmu with its ancient gompa and remarkable rock carvings provide a fascinating dimension to the stage before ascending to the camp at the base of the Dung Dung La for unrivalled views of the high peaks and ridges that enclose this 'hidden valley'.

From camp, cross the main river and follow the trail on the true right of the valley. The trail ascends a side ridge. It then descends to the valley floor before crossing the river and following an irrigation channel down to the village of **Sumdo Chinmu** (3920m).

There is a small gompa close to the village and some large stone statues of the Maitreya Buddha (the Buddha to come) nearby. The trail remains on the true left of the valley for a further 2km before winding down to the valley floor, covered in a thick canopy of willow trees and wild rose bushes. There is a further river crossing before reaching a small side stream flowing from the nearby peaks, including **Photaksar** (5685m). This is also the base of the Dung Dung La and the point where the trail splits to Alchi (see Alternative Route).

To reach the base of the Dung Dung La, a short, if rather steep, ascent to an **intermediary ridge** (4430m) is required. The ascent will take about one hour. En route there is a profusion of edelweiss and other wildflowers, which survive on Ladakh's minimal rainfall. A delightful meadow for camping at 4400m is shared with yak herders from **Chiling** village, who graze their animals here in summer. Time from the base to camp is about two hours or 4km.

CHILING VILLAGE & THE BRIDGE

Chiling in Ladakhi means 'outsider', as the original inhabitants were craftsmen from Nepal. It is said that the famous Ladakhi ruler Singge Namgyal invited the craftsmen to decorate the *Golden Buddha* in Shey Palace in the Indus Valley, 10km from Leh. The King was so pleased with the result that he offered them a tract of land at Chiling where they settled. In the winter they continue to follow their traditional profession making the copperware and cooking pots that are found in so many Ladakhi homes – as well as spoons and other intricately carved brassware that are sold in the Leh market.

While the villagers of Chiling have intermarried with villagers in the lower Markha Valley, there has not always been a harmonious relationship regarding the river crossing over the Zanskar River. Despite petitions made by the villagers of the Markha Valley for a bridge there was only a pulley bridge operated by the villagers from Chiling who charged a hefty Rs 100 per crossing. After many years of frustrations the villagers in the Markha Valley brought the matter to a head in September 2007 destroying the pulley bridge and forcing the Ladakh Hill Council to finally construct a regular bridge. In the interim the only way to cross the river was by inflatable rafts brought in by an enterprising travel agent from Leh.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: ALCHI VIA THE STAKSPI LA

2 days, 30km

This route is an alternative way to end the trek. From Sumdo Chinmu, follow the trail down the valley past the base of the Dung Dung La. This entails following a rough trail that crosses the river several times before it diverts to a side ridge to the north of the valley. The trail leads up and over to the village of Sumdo Choon (note: Sumdo Choon means little village, and Sumdo Chinmu, big village).

At **Sumdo Choon** (4450m), the small gompa is affiliated with Alchi. There is an impressive statue of the Maitreya Buddha in the adjoining temple and a nearby **campsite**.

Above the village, the trail leads to the base of the pass from where there is a short, steep ascent to the Stakspi La (4970m) and uninterrupted views of the **Ladakh Range**.

The trail descends quite steeply to a small grazing area and shepherd's shelter and a possible campsite. From here, it is a three-hour trek down to Alchi (3200m) before a further 4km along the road to the Alchi bridge and the main highway to Leh.

The temple complex at Alchi was founded in the 11th century when the noted teacher, Ringchen Brangpo, was sent by a local Tibetan king to lay the foundations for Buddhist gompas throughout Ladakh and the Zanskar. Due to its sheltered location, Alchi has remained intact to the present day.

The major point of interest at Alchi's gompa stems from the fact that the Tibetans, being newly converted to Buddhism, did not have the artistic skills necessary to decorate the temples. Artists from the Kashmir Valley (whose Buddhist temples have long been destroyed) were therefore commissioned to complete the walls and entrances.

For a complete survey of the Alchi temples, and a detailed history of the other gompas in Ladakh, refer to Volume 1 of Snellgrove and Skorupski's *The Cultural History of Ladakh*.

From the Kargil-Leh Rd there are regular buses to Leh (Rs 30, two hours).

Day 5: Dung Dung La Base to Chiling via Dung Dung La

6 hours, 15km

From the crest of the Dung Dung La the true dimensions of the trans-Himalaya unfold. These include magnificent views of the Stok and Ladakh ranges, while to the south are the rugged ridges and peaks that rise high above the Zanskar River as it forges its way to the confluence of the Indus River.

It is not a particularly steep ascent from camp to the pass. The trail winds past yak-herders' camps before gradually crossing a series of scree slopes to the **Dung Dung La** (4710m). An early start is imperative to appreciate the mountain panorama before the clouds form.

From the pass it is a 1300m descent to Chiling village. The route from the pass

winds high around the contours for about 2km before commencing the long gradual descent. About halfway down, the trail leads through a small settlement. From here the trail descends steeply as it forges a way down a narrow gorge. It is a welcome relief to reach the outlying fields of Chiling that are set on a fertile ridge above the **Zanskar River**. Allow around four hours from the pass to camp, located just above the village.

Chiling (3250m) is connected to Nimmu (north, on the Kargil-Leh road) by a road alongside the Zanskar River. The road is currently being extended south through the Zanskar Gorge and will eventually reach Padum and the Zanskar Valley.

KANJI LA & SHILA GORGE

Duration 6 days
Distance 69km
Difficulty demanding
Start Lamayuru
Finish Rangdum
Nearest Towns Leh/Kargil
Transport bus
Summary Essentially a wilderness trek, following remote trails over the outlying ridges of the Zanskar Range and through spectacular gorges from the ancient gompa at Lamayuru to Rangdum.

A trek that will amply challenge the ambitions of the more intrepid trekker intent on following trails through remote gorges and over high passes en route to Rangdum. There is also the possibility of completing this trek in reverse and continuing to Chiling on the Hidden Valleys of Ladakh trek, and then ascending the Markha Valley (see the Markha Valley trek, p63) to complete an ambitious traverse beyond the Indus Valley.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trek can be undertaken from early June until mid-October, although anticipate snow on the Kanji La until early July. Summer storms in the Shilakong Gorge, together with the water levels in June and July, should also be considered.

What to Bring

A tent and stove, plus food and fuel supplies for at least five days is necessary. A length of rope may be required for some river crossings.

Maps

Refer to the *Ladakh/Zanskar (Centre)* trek section 1:150,000 published by Olizane as well as the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 3 Leh, Zanskar & Nubra Valley* and *Sheet 2 Kargil, Zanskar & Nun Kun*. Also refer to Nelles Verlag 1:350,000 *Ladakh & Zanskar* and the US military U502 series 1:250,000 NI 43-07 *ref Kargil* and *NI 43-08 ref Leh*.

Accommodation

At Lamayuru, there are a number of lodges, including **Hotel Dragon** (r Rs 200-300) and **Siachen Guesthouse** (r Rs 200-300). There is a **campsite** (per tent Rs 100) just below the road.

Camping is the only option en route with Rs 100 fee in the vicinity of Kanji village. At Rangdum there are plentiful campsites in the vicinity of the gompa. Also consider heading a couple of kilometres south to the village of Tashi Tongtse or staying at the **JKTDC Tourist Bungalow** (r Rs 200) at Juldo.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

There is a bus from Leh to Lamayuru (Rs 150, four hours), and from Rangdum to Kargil (Rs 200, 10 hours) and Padum (Rs 110, six hours). If the buses are fully booked, a seat in a truck is the best alternative.

THE TREK (see map p60)

Day 1: Lamayuru to Shila

3–4 hours, 10km

See Day 1 of the Hidden Valleys of Ladakh trek (p67) but camp at **Shila** and from there head down to **Wanlah** to visit the gompa and village.

Day 2: Shila to Shilakong

5–6 hours, 15km

The trail ascends the impressive Shila Gorge as it forges its way through an outer rim of the Zanskar Range. In places the gorge is so narrow that the sun only penetrates the depths of the gorge for a few hours each day creating a sense of remoteness that would be hard to equal on the second day out of any other trek in Ladakh.

From **Shila** (3200m) follow the dirt road for 2km past the turn-off to the **Prinkiti La** to the hot springs. Don't expect much. The site is dirty and devoid of charm and consists of a meagre campsite where families from Kargil spend up to a week availing themselves of the medicinal benefits of the waters.

Beyond the hot springs the trail enters a narrow gorge. Rock cairns are a rarity so look out for mule droppings, human footprints or even broken twigs to get an indication of the trail through the willow thickets. River crossing and wet boots are also unavoidable particularly in July and August.

After 5km the gorge splits. Follow the left (north) gorge and continue to follow the course of the main river. After a further 5km there is a copse of silver birches, and shortly after, the gorge widens for the final gradual ascent to the camp at **Shilakong** (4030m).

The camp is located just above the confluence of two river valleys. The valley flowing from the south defines the route over a subsidiary ridge to the **Sisir La**.

Day 3: Shilakong to Kanji village via Yogma La

3½– 4½ hours, 9km

Fine views of the Zanskar Range from the Yogma La together with a delightful descent to the outlying fields of Kanji village provide a remarkable contrast to the confines of the Shila Gorge.

From camp cross the side stream and head up the west valley. It's a gradual haul to the pass across scree slopes and tiny meadows, while glancing to the south there are clear views to the **Sisir La** (4720m) on the far side of the valley. Time to the pass is around 1½ to two hours.

From the **Yogma La** (4650m) the views extend across the rugged profile of the Zanskar Range while the outlying fields of Kanji village provide a sense of relief in this otherwise barren landscape. From the pass follow the steep switchbacks before a long, gradual descent across scant pastures to Kanji.

The substantial village of **Kanji** (3790m) supports around 40 families. Solar panels are in evidence on the roofs of most of the houses while greenhouses ensure a healthy crop of root vegetables throughout the year. The campsite is about 500m above the village. Time from the pass to the village is about two to 2½ hours.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: KANJI VILLAGE TO HENISKOT

2–3 hours, 12km

If time is at a premium, descend through the Kanji Gorge to the village at Heniskot on the Kargil–Leh road. The trail through the gorge is well maintained while bridges are in place for most of the river crossings. Plans are also in place to eventually link Kanji to the main highway although this might take at least a few more years to complete.

The village of **Heniskot** (3550m) is on the far side of the Kargil-Leh road, and is approached through a small gorge down the valley from where the trail meets the road. Hitch a ride on a truck (Rs 30, one hour) over the **Fatu La** (4147m) to Lamayuru.

Day 4: Kanji Village to Base Kanji La

3 hours, 8km

A day to explore more remarkable gorges as well as visiting encampments where villagers tend to their yaks in summer.

Head up the main valley for 3km before crossing a bridge over the main stream then continue for a further 1km to a yak herders' camp. Follow the main river course for a further 2km to a large open grazing area. Ford the main stream to the gorge on the true left (north). Head up the gorge for 3km to the confluence of two tributaries. Follow the tributary on the true left to a small, grassy campsite (4200m).

Day 5: Kanji La Base to camp via Kanji La

5½–6 hours 14km

The Kanji La is literally the highlight of the trek. From the pass the views stretch north west as far as the East Karakoram while a short climb just above the pass will afford views of K2 and other 8000m peaks. The snow-capped Ladakh Range north of the Indus Valley provides a further inspiring panorama while to the south are the countless rugged ridges and jagged peaks of the Zanskar Range.

Ascend the side valley to an established rock cairn before a steep 300m climb to a prominent ridge top. Once on the ridge there is an opportunity to appreciate the route that

winds up to the pass just to the east of a small glacier at the head of the valley.

The trail crosses a broad plateau for about 3km before a steep, tiring ascent over loose scree (under snow early in the season). The last 150m is particularly steep and can be icy. Time from base camp to the **Kanji La** (5150m) is around three to 3½ hours.

After savouring views of the East Karakoram grit your teeth and make the effort to ascend the barren ridge immediately west of the pass. After 10 minutes or so there are views of the unmistakable peak of K2.

From the pass there is a long descent traversing extensive scree slopes before the trail enters a narrow gorge. Snow bridges are still in place in the gorge for most of the season and define the route to a small campsite (4150m) just above the confluence of the Kanji stream and the larger river flowing from the east towards **Rangdum**.

Allow two to 2½ hours from the pass.

Day 6: Camp to Rangdum

5 hours, 13km

After the exhilaration of crossing the pass there is the prospect of a relatively straightforward day to Rangdum gompa. Watch

LADAKH: PHYSICAL, STATISTICAL & HISTORICAL

Lieutenant Joseph Cunningham was one of a handful of distinguished travellers who trekked across Ladakh in the mid-19th century. Following the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, an agreement between the British authorities and the new Maharajah of Kashmir, permitted the British to assume at least partial responsibility to defend the vast territories of the Jammu & Kashmir State (J&K), including Ladakh.

In 1847, a Boundary Commission was established with three members: Lieutenant Henry Stratchey, Dr Thomas Thomson and its leader, Lieutenant Cunningham. The Commission instructed each member to undertake extensive travels across Ladakh to the Tibetan borderlands. Cunningham's findings were recorded in his book *The Physical Geography of Western Tibet*, while his writing on *Ladakh: Physical, Statistical & Historical* remains one of the most important works of the time and was recently reprinted in Delhi.

Ladakh: Physical, Statistical & Historical followed the standard format of the time. It was a government publication, a gazette that demanded factual information and granted little scope for reflection. Separate chapters covered geography, mountains, rivers, lakes, roads, the climate, commerce, government, people, history, religion and language that would be hard to match in present-day guidebooks!

Cunningham outlined all the major trails into and out of Ladakh. These included the track over the Zoji La from Kashmir to Ladakh; the route from Kishtwar over the Umasi La to Zanskar and Leh (compiled by Dr Thomson); a route from Manali over the Baralacha La to the Indus Valley and Leh; the route to the north of the region over the Karakoram Pass to Yarkand and Khotan; and the northwest road from Baltistan and Skardu up the Indus Valley. These are routes that we can only dream of today, as most either cross or go close to sensitive international borders.

The height of every major pass to and from Ladakh is listed – they were calculated based on the time required to boil water, so most are only accurate to the nearest 60m (200ft). All important bridges are also classified into either stone, wooden or others such as rope-suspension bridges and the famous twig bridges. Of the twig bridges, Cunningham wrote that they were both difficult and dangerous – something that trekkers up to a decade ago would experience on many treks in Zanskar. The fording of rivers in summer also occupies Cunningham's attention. He recommends they be attempted by 10am before the levels rise with the spring snowmelt – sound advice that should still be heeded today.

Cunningham comprehensively describes the wild animals. Diagrams of the wild yak and the kiang are illustrated in great detail. He also outlines the distribution of the markhor and the Marco Polo sheep long before the species were in danger of extinction. Indeed, his report – like so many of the day – provided a basis for both political intelligence and sport, and marked the beginning of an era when sportsmen undertook hunting trips across the West Himalaya and Ladakh for months at a time.

out for blue sheep on the high ridges while the lower reaches of the valley support some of the few brown bears still found in Ladakh.

Cross the main stream exercising caution, particularly in July and August, before climbing up to a well-defined trail on the south (true left) side of the valley. This is also the trail linking Rangdum and Lingshet village (See Singge La & Lamayuru trek, p75).

Head down the valley for 2km to a side valley with good water and an alternative campsite. Continue down the true left for 5km to 6km. By now the snow-capped ridges of the Himalaya Range can be seen in the distance as well as Rangdum gompa perched on a small hill. Just after the gompa comes into sight the trail descends to the main valley floor and continues down to the gompa and the Kargil to Padum road.

There is no village at **Rangdum** (3980m), just a gompa. The nearest settlements are **Tashi Tuntse**, about 2km to the south of Rangdum, or **Juldo**, 5km to the north on the road leading to Kargil. These villages consider themselves to be part of Zanskar. The Rangdum gompa was established in the 18th century, and is affiliated with the Gelukpa order and is administered by **Karsha**.

PADUM & THE ZANSKAR VALLEY

The tiny Zanskar kingdom is wedged between the main Himalaya and the Zanskar Range in one of the most remote regions of the West Himalaya. It still takes two long days to drive from Leh to Padum, the administrative centre of Zanskar. From Padum allow a further day to drive to the trail head as road developments in Zanskar have played havoc with the classic trekking itineraries.

Once on the trail however the combination of remote settlements, ancient gompas and dramatic views of the rugged mountain make trekking in Zanskar particularly attractive.

HISTORY

Zanskar – the Hidden Kingdom is an apt assessment of a region that never figured on any of the major trade routes. Historical research indicates that few armies and traders visited this isolated kingdom, even though the gompas and villages were established by the 10th century.

By the late 14th century, Buddhist monks and scholars ventured over the passes from the Indus Valley to establish gompas at Karsha, Lingshet and Mune in the name of the Gelukpa order. Two centuries later, monks from the Drukpa order (affiliated with the Ladakh royal family) founded the gompas at Bardan and Zangla.

It was not until the early 19th century that Europeans travellers reached the Zanskar. One of the first was Hungarian scholar Coso de Koros, who spent the best part of a year in 1826–27 translating the Buddhist texts from Ladakhi to English.

In the early 1830s the Dogra general Zorawar Singh led his army over the Umasi La during his conquest of Ladakh and the Zanskar. In 1834 he reduced the powers

THE ROAD TO PADUM

Although it is difficult to predict how long it will take to complete the road up the Zanskar Gorge to Padum, it will undoubtedly change the character of Zanskar. The road will provide year-round access between Padum and Leh and will take no more than six hours. This is in contrast to the present situation where the road to Padum over the Penste La is snow-bound for over six months of the year and even in the summer necessitates a two-day journey via Kargil to reach Leh. Once the road is complete there is also speculation that the people of Zanskar, who are predominantly Buddhist, will be governed by Leh rather than by the Muslim administration in Kargil. There are also plans to extend the road from Padum to link up with the road being developed from Darcha in Lahaul. The route is proposed over the Shingo La – although the pass is subject to heavy winter snows. Whatever the outcome the road will be extended up the Tsarap and Kargyak Valleys. At present the trail head is at Reru but within a few years it will extend to Purne. This will again necessitate a further review of the trekking possibilities in Zanskar.

of the royal families in both Padum and Zangla to a nominal status and established the fort at the village of Pipiting, just north of Padum. He is also said to have paid a local guide a small fortune to lead his army through the Zanskar gorges to mount a surprise attack on the King of Ladakh. On reflection things have not changed so much. Reliable guides who have regularly undertaken the Remote Zanskar trek or the routes over the Kang La or the Umasi La are still at a premium.

ENVIRONMENT

Zanskar comprises two narrow valleys – the Stod Valley in the northwest and the Tsarap Valley in the southeast – and extends north to where the Zanskar River enters the impressive gorges of the Zanskar Range.

The Zanskar Range forms the backbone of southern Ladakh. It includes several peaks above 6000m and a multitude of high ridges and rock spires that would keep the geologist busy for seasons.

There are no national park areas in the Zanskar. However, as elsewhere in Ladakh, Buddhist beliefs ensure that wildlife is preserved, except when wolves or snow leopards attack the villagers' domestic animals. The wilderness regions close to the Zanskar gorges are renowned for wildlife, including brown bears and ibex. Herds of urial have been spotted roaming the high ridges way above the Zanskar River.

The alpine meadows closest to the Himalaya Range support a selection of wildflowers, although the variety is in no way comparable to the verdant valleys of Himachal Pradesh.

ACCESS TOWNS

See Padum (p94) and Kargil (p91).

Most trekkers undertaking a trek out of the Zanskar Valley spend a day or more making their arrangements in Padum, the administrative centre of Zanskar, before heading off on the trail. Spending time in Padum also provides a convenient base for visiting some of the ancient gompas in the vicinity before packing up again and heading off on the trek.

It is also likely that you will have had to spend at least a night in Kargil before travelling to Padum.

SINGGE LA & LAMAYURU

Duration 8 days
Distance 108km
Difficulty demanding
Start Padum
Finish Honupatta
Transport bus
Summary A popular but challenging traverse of the Zanskar Range, visiting remote villages and gompas reflecting Ladakh's ancient Buddhist culture.

A traverse of the trans-Himalaya linking the Zanskar and Indus Valleys and following trails to tiny gompas and isolated settlements. Road developments have necessitated changes. It is now possible to complete the trek in a week by driving direct to Riman (Day 2) and arranging transport at the current trailhead at Honupatta (Day 8). To extend the trek to Lamayuru consider the alternative trek bypassing Honupatta via the Shila Gorge. When the road eventually extends to Lingshet it will be time to re-assess the itinerary. However, the route from Lingshet via the Kesi La, the Kanji La and the Yogma La will ensure a viable trek for the future.

PLANNING

When to Trek

Monks and villagers normally cross the highest passes by early June. The passes remain open until late October.

What to Bring

Unless you are prepared to sleep in a basic shelter hut on some stages of this trek, you should bring a tent. A stove, fuel and food for the stages where there are no lodges, should be brought from Padum.

Maps

Refer to the *Ladakh/Zanskar (Centre)* trek section 1:150,000 published by Olizane and to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 3 Leh, Zanskar & Nubra Valley*. Also refer to Nelles Verlag 1:350,000 *Ladakh & Zanskar sheet* and the US military U502 series 1:250,000 map *NI 43-12 ref Martselang* and *NI 43-08 ref Leh*.

Accommodation

There are lodges and parachute tents on most but not all stages of the trek. There are parachute tents at most camps. However, they are not always there at Snertse, at the base of the Hanuma La or at the base of the Singge La particularly at the margins of the seasons.

At Lamayuru, there are a number of lodges, including **Hotel Dragon** (r Rs 200-300) and **Siachen Guesthouse** (r Rs 200-300). There is a **campsite** per tent (Rs 100) just below the road.

If you are carrying your own tent, expect to pay about Rs 100 in camping fees when you are in the vicinity of a village.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

For travel to Padum, see Getting There & Away (p215). At present there is a bus service from Wanlah to Khalsi that continues as far as Phanjila (Rs 25, two hours) Trucks and taxis will soon ply the route to Honupatta but for the moment you may have to walk down and around the road developments. If following the alternative route to Lamayuru then anticipate being on the main Kargil to Leh road by first light when the first truck and bus convoys arrive from Kargil. Expect to pay Rs 150 for the four-hour drive to Leh.

THE TREK (see maps p56–7)

Day 1: Padum to Karsha

2 hours, 6km

A short stage that allows time to visit Karsha gompa – the largest in Zanskar. Although a road extends from Padum to Karsha this can be avoided at some stages. Alternatively if you're coming from Kargil, it is possible to drive straight to Karsha and bypass this first day.

The route is clearly visible from Padum and can, if you choose, lead through some villages away from the road. Follow the trail from Padum to **Pipiting** village and the prominent Dogra Fort dating back to the 1830s when Zorawar Singh first invaded Zanskar. Follow the road for a short distance past the Amchi medical centre before cutting across the fields to the bridge over the Stod River. There is a steady climb for 1km to **Karsha** village (3650m) and the campsite located just below the gompa.

To reach Karsha gompa ascend the labyrinth of alleyways above the village to the main entrance before climbing up to the main courtyard and nearby Assembly Hall. The monks are particularly keen to show you around. For a donation of Rs 100, they will invite you to have tea on the courtyard above the main Assembly Hall, from where you can enjoy panoramic views of the Zanskar Valley and the peaks of the Himalaya Range to the south. The gompa attracts monks from many of the surrounding villages; up to 100 may be in attendance at any one time. The site was probably founded in the 10th century, while the main prayer hall and monks' quarters would have been built in the early 15th century, when the Gelukpa order was popularised in Ladakh.

Day 2: Karsha to Pishu

4–5 hours, 14km

Another short stage with time to savour the views of the high jagged ridges that rise high above the whitewashed settlements on the west side of the valley, including the substantial village of **Stongde**. Although the road extends all the way to Rinam the walk will assist with acclimatisation before traversing the high passes in the days to come.

Head through Karsha village to the main trail, where you begin a dry, dusty and undulating walk, at times alongside the swift flowing current of the Zanskar River. It takes around two hours to reach the settlement of **Rinam** (3550m) with time for a break before continuing alongside the course of the Zanskar River for a further 7km to **Pishu** (3470m).

Like all villages in Zanskar, the entrance to the village is marked by a long *mani* wall and chortens. There is a huge grassy campsite, complete with a spring, below the village and close to the river. There is also a parachute tent in the vicinity where Ladakhi crews wile away the afternoon watching Bollywood movies.

This easy stage allows time to visit **Zangla** village. To reach Zangla cross the bridge over the Zanskar River and then head north along the dirt road to the outskirts of the village. There is also a nunnery and dilapidated fort from where there are commanding views of the upper Zanskar Valley.

Day 3: Pishu to Hanumil

4–5 hours, 13km

This is another relatively level stage (a rarity in Ladakh) following the Zanskar River to

wander the villages of Pidmu and Hanumil that together with Pishu and Chazar and Honia, on the other side of the Zanskar River, form the tiny kingdom of Zangla.

From Pishu, the trail follows the river bank for 2km before ascending a dry plateau with sweeping views of the Zanskar region. The village of **Pidmu** (3420m) is about halfway. The trail heads north through the barley fields before descending to the river bank to complete the 6km or 7km to Hanumil.

After a rather dry and dusty walk **Hanumil** (3380m) is a welcome oasis comprising a few houses set amid willow trees and well-tended barley fields. The village is at the mouth of an impressive side gorge while the campsite is a short distance past the village with fine views down the Zanskar Gorge. There is also a parachute tent where arrangements can be made for overnight accommodation.

Day 4: Hanumil to Snertse via Purfi La

5–6 hours, 14km

After the relative ease of the past few stages the going now gets harder as the trail ascends the Purfi La – a minor ridge – defining the route that leads beyond the Zanskar Valley.

From Hanumil the trail winds high above the Zanskar River for 5km to the base of the Purfi La. In contrast to previous stages there are occasional cypress trees, wild roses and a selection of herbal plants growing on the upper scree slopes while there are regular sightings of lammergeiers and golden eagles hovering on the thermals.

The ascent to the **Purfi La** (3850m) should take no more than 30 minutes, and from the pass the views stretch south to the Himalaya Range, while to the north you can appreciate what lies ahead to the camp at Snertse. It doesn't look good! There is a steep 500m descent to the Zinchen Tokpo followed by a steady 400m ascent to the camp. The descent takes the best part of an hour (although Ladakhi guides do it in 15 minutes). The bridge over the Zinchen Tokpo marks the boundary of Zanskar and Ladakh. There is welcome shelter of poplar and willow trees just beyond the bridge before you summon enough strength to complete the next ascent. There is a small shepherd encampment at **Snertse** (3740m), above a dusty campsite.

Day 5: Snertse to Lingshet via Hanuma La

6–7 hours, 17km

A demanding stage that includes a traverse over the Hanuma La that affords commanding views of the rugged course of the Zanskar River as well as a bird's-eye view of the isolated settlement of Lingshet.

A steep 400m climb leads out of the narrow gorge above the Snertse campsite. In spring, this section is easier as you can simply ascend the snow bridges. Beyond the gorge the gradient eases to reach a shepherd camp about two hours beyond Snertse. Continue along the dry valley floor for a further 2km before taking the north fork in the valley that ascends to the Hanuma La. The last 2km or 3km to the pass is not demanding. The time from Snertse to the pass is 3½ to four hours.

The **Hanuma La** (4710m) is marked by two large chortens and prayer flags, with spectacular views north to the Singge La and the rugged Zanskar Gorge. The snow-capped peaks of the **Ladakh Range** can also be appreciated. Below, Lingshet gompa is visible on the opposite side of the valley.

The descent is quite steep with many switchbacks followed by a short climb over an intermediary ridge before a long and gradual descent to Lingshet. There are a number of campsites a couple of kilometres before the village. Otherwise, continue to Lingshet where the campsite and parachute tents are just beyond the gompa. The time from the pass to the village is around three hours.

Lingshet village (3850m) is an ideal place for a rest day. Lingshet gompa was founded by the Gelukpa order with its teachings from Tibet. There is, however, an older site further down the valley that may date back to the same time as Sani and Alchi, when Buddhism was first established in Ladakh. There are normally 20 to 30 monks in attendance, and the gompa serves the outlying villages of Nirag, Yulchang and Skyumpata.

Day 6: Lingshet to Base Singge La

5–6 hours, 16km

After the rigours of crossing the Hanuma La it may seem at first glance that this is a relatively straightforward stage. This is not

the case. To reach the base of the Singge La there is no shortage of ascents and descents including two intermediary passes – the Netuke La and the Khyupa La. Yet the views that extend across the countless ridges of the Zanskar Range, as well as the tiny settlements, more than compensate for the efforts of the day.

The trail from **Lingshet** gradually ascends the first of the intermediary passes, the **Netuke La** (4280m), before the long descent to the river (3920m), just below the settlement of **Skyumpata** (4100m). It's a further tiring ascent for 1½ hours to the **Khyupa La** (4360m). The trail leads on for a further 3km to a campsite and parachute tent run by villagers from the nearby Yulchang settlement. A further 3km on is the **Singge La base** (4400m) where there is an adequate, albeit rocky, campsite beside the spring, which eventually cascades down to the Zanskar River 1000m below. Parachute tents may be available but best to check with the villages at Yulchang before proceeding to the base camp.

Day 7: Base Singge La to Photaksar via Singge La

6 hours, 15km

The traverse of the Singge La – literally the Lions pass – marks the highpoint of the trek. From the pass there are unrivalled views way down to the Zanskar River. These include the peaks and ridges that define the vast scale of the Zanskar Range that extend north to the snowy ridges of the Ladakh Range and south to the high peaks of the Himalaya.

The ascent to the pass takes around one to 1½ hours, although fit trekkers may take around half that time. The first few switchbacks extend across the scree slopes beneath frozen waterfalls flowing from limestone cliffs that guard the pass.

The views from the **Singge La** (5010m) are particularly impressive, while there is a remarkable 6000m peak immediately to the west of the pass. From the pass there is a short descent to the true left of the valley floor. The trail then heads towards the true right of the valley and a stone shelter hut before recrossing the valley to the scant grazing pastures and a side stream that may take a little time to ford.

Beyond the side stream, the trail ascends some 5km or 6km to an intermediary ridge that leads to the Photang Valley and **Photaksar** (4100m), which supports two small gompas serviced by monks from Lamayuru. There is a choice of campsites opposite or just above the village. Parachute tents should also be in place. The time from the pass to the village is around four hours.

Day 8: Photaksar to Honupatta via Sisir La

6 hours, 16km

If time is at a premium this may be the last stage of the trek as the road is well underway to Honupatta and will in the next few years extend to Photaksar. Nonetheless the ascent to the Sisir La is a real highlight. The dramatic morning light on the ridges and rock spires high above the Photang Valley will make every photographer a professional!

From the campsite opposite **Photaksar**, continue 2km to the Photang River and cross the bridge to the true left of the valley. There follows a gradual climb for about two hours to the base of the Sisir La. Follow the well-defined trail that ascends a side ridge before completing the final steep climb to the pass.

From the **Sisir La** (4720m), the views back to the Singge La and the main Zanskar Range are particularly impressive. To the north the trail leads down a scree slope to the valley floor before continuing on the true left of the valley for 5km to the first of the campsites above Honupatta village. The time from the pass is around three hours.

Three chortens mark the entrance to **Honupatta** (3900m), while the huge, ancient cypress tree in the village is adorned with Buddhist prayer flags. There are some lodges in the village for accommodation and food.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: SISIR LA TO LAMAYURU VIA THE SHILA GORGE

3 days, 35km

With the development of the road to Honupatta this is an attractive way to extend the trek to Lamayuru. However, before heading off check with the villagers in Photaksar or with mule attendants returning from Lamayuru regarding the water level in the Shila Gorge, which can rise dramatically after unseasonal storms.

From the **Sisir La** descend almost to the valley floor before heading west up a further

CHORTENS

The chorten (or stupa in Tibetan; a reliquary or shrine to the memory of a Buddhist saint) is found throughout the valleys and trails in Ladakh and the Zanskar.

Originally the chorten was built to serve as a monument where the ashes of important Buddhist teachers and lamas were buried. However, over time it also served to commemorate the important events in the life of the Buddha and as a reminder of the five elements of the cosmos – earth, wind, fire, air and ether.

At the entrance of some of the towns and villages the chorten has a passage cut through the base through which the traveller passes before entering the village. Many of the chortens along the trails in Ladakh and the Zanskar are found in a series of three with each painted a different colour. The white chorten represents knowledge, yellow represents wisdom and black represents the protector, with each of the chortens being given a fresh coat of paint before an important festival or after the death of a wealthy villager.

ridge and a small pass that leads over and down to **Shilakong** camp at the head of the Shila Gorge. There are also other small camps a few kilometres down the gorge. On the second day continue on down the Shila Gorge (see Kanji La & Shila Gorge trek, p71) as far as the settlement at **Shila**, taking time to visit the nearby Wanlah gompa and village. The third day heads over the **Prinkiti La** to **Lamayuru** with time that day to visit the gompa before heading to Leh the next day.

REMOTE ZANSKAR

Duration 9 days
Distance 125km
Difficulty demanding
Start Padum
Finish Shang Sumdo
Transport bus
Summary A trek through spectacular wilderness and impressive gorges that characterise the heart of the Zanskar Range.

One of the most challenging treks in Ladakh. An opportunity to follow remote trails through deep gorges and over high passes (including four in the vicinity of 5000m) linking Zanskar with the outlying settlements of the Indus Valley. The remote trails and the absence of villages between Zangla and the Markha Valley deter all but the most adventurous trekkers.

The climb to the Cha Cha La is steep while the trail (of sorts!) through the gorges often involves crossing landslides and boulder fields that test even the best Ladakhi horse attendants. Even in autumn, most stages are 'wet-boot days' until you reach the upper reaches of the Markha Valley and the established trail to the Indus Valley and Leh.

Allow time to acclimatise by undertaking day walks to the forts and gompas around Padum.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The high water levels in July and August necessitate short stages and intermediary campsites. September and October are best when the water levels in the gorges drop to safer levels.

What to Bring

Carry a tent, food and fuel for at least a week, plus a length of rope for river crossings. A pair of sandshoes will also be handy if your boots don't dry out.

Maps

Refer to the *Ladakh/Zanskar (Centre)* trek section 1:150,000 published by Olizane and also the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 3 Leh, Zanskar & Nubra Valley*. Also refer to Nelles Verlag 1:350,000 *Ladakh & Zanskar sheet* and the US military U502 series 1:250,000 map *43-12 ref Martselang*.

Accommodation

While there are parachute tents in Zangla, that is about it until the Markha Valley. Beyond Zangla, there is no food or accommodation available.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

For travel to Padum, see Getting There & Away (p94). From Shang Sumdo, the daily bus service to Leh leaves early morning (Rs 34, two hours). If you plan to end the trek in Leh, see Getting There & Away (p215).

THE TREK (see map p56–7)

Days 1 & 2: Padum to Zangla via Karsha & Pishu

2 days, 24km

To avoid most of the road that extends from Padum to Zangla it is advisable to trek via Karsha gompa and then continue down the true left bank of the Zanskar River to Pishu village (See Days 1 and 2 of the Singge La & Lamayuru trek, p75). From Pishu cross the bridge over the Zanskar River to reach Zangla on the second day of the trek.

The largest house in **Zangla** (3370m) is home to the current king of Zangla. Although he now fulfils a nominal role, the royal family lineage can be traced back to the times when Zanskar was split. One side of the family ruled from Padum, and the other from Zangla. During the invasion of Zorawar Singh in 1834, the king of Padum was killed. On hearing of this, the king of Zangla was able to reach an accord, which allowed him to retain a nominal rule over the nearby villages of **Honia** and Chazar, and the villages of **Hanumil**, **Pidmu** and **Pishu** on the far side of the valley. The head monk at Spitok is related to this family, and also administers the Zangla gompa, which is on the cliff just beyond the village.

Day 3: Zangla to Sumdo

3 hours, 9km

After leaving Zangla, enter a wilderness region of deep gorges and high passes. A fitting reminder that there are no villages or settlements until you are within striking distance of the Indus Valley.

Follow the trail beyond the chortens, up past the dilapidated fort high above the village. The trail enters a side gorge and descends alongside a concrete irrigation canal that also supplies the village's micro hydro-electric scheme. The trail remains on the true right of the gorge for 1km before the first of many river crossings. Watch out for **rock cairns** marking the route. The trail cuts through willow thickets for 5km or 6km before the gorge opens out into a broad valley. Follow the northern tributary to a flat, albeit, dusty campsite (3800m).

Day 4: Sumdo to Camp via Cha Cha La

6 hours, 13km

The first challenge of the trek is not without compensation. Ascending the Cha Cha La affords views south to the Himalaya Range while the numerous ridges and labyrinth of gorges of the Zanskar extend north as far as the eye can see.

From camp the trail ascends eastwards entering a dry silent valley. There is no water between here and the far side of the pass. The trail gradually winds up a series of 'scree steps' each around 200m to 250m before cutting out of the valley to the final 200m to 300m steep climb to the pass.

From the **Cha Cha La** (4950m) there is a 100m descent to the source of the **Tilat Sumdo**. At times the trail follows the course of the stream and at others it winds high on the true left of the valley to avoid sections where the gorge is too narrow to negotiate. It's a time also for wet boots as there is more than one section where the trail actually follows the stream. The camp is located at the confluence of two gorges. Time from the pass to camp is around two to 2½ hours. The camp (4000m) is a legacy of the Khampa migration to Zanskar that continued to the early 1980s. It is still covered with millions of sheep pellets that make a soft bed on which to pitch your tent.

Day 5: Camp to Tilat Sumdo

6 hours, 16km

This is remote gorge country where the sun rarely penetrates the depths of the gorge for more than a few hours a day. If the thought of constantly wet boots and numb toes appeals then this is it, compensated by the thought that only a handful of trekkers will follow this route each season.

Note that it takes on average six to seven hours to reach **Tilat Sumdo** in autumn. In late summer (in July and August) the water levels are higher and there may be no option but to split this stage by walking only in the morning until around 10am before the water levels become too high.

From the Khampa camp it is around 1½ hours to the confluence of a tributary flowing in from the true left (west). From here the gorge widens although there are numerous river crossings. Note the occasional cypress tree clinging to the highest ridges and the many rock caves.

It is hard to get a true indication of your location as the gorge constantly twists and turns. After a further 2½ hours another river flows in from the true right, and then two hours (5km) after that yet another river flows into the main gorge, again from the true right. From here it is a further hour (2km) to the confluence with the **Khurna River**. On reaching the confluence the prayer flags on the opposite bank are a welcome sight before fording the swift, silent waters of the river to the campsite at **Tilat Sumdo** (3750m).

Day 6: Tilat Sumdo to Base Zalung Karpo La

5–6 hours, 15km

The third day negotiating the gorge country is just as demanding as the previous two. It is also just as remote, just as challenging (with more wet boots) and just as spectacular as you come to grips with the true dimensions of this vast wilderness region.

It's a cold start to the morning as you commence to wade up the **Khurna River** in waist-high water. Initially there is no trail. Its just a matter of following the course of the gorge as best you can, switching from one river bank to the other as the terrain dictates. There are around 20 river crossings before reaching the confluence of the Khurna River and the river flowing from the **Rubrang La**. Time from camp is about two hours. The confluence is also marked by prayer flags and you can be forgiven for making a small fire before heading up the side gorge.

After 2km the side gorge is particularly narrow and the trail winds high above the river bed. At this point the mules may have to be offloaded and lead around the precipitous trail until it descends back to the riverbed. From here the gorge widens and gradually ascends through boulder fields and willow thickets. About 3½ to four hours above the confluence there is a grassy flat and a comfortable campsite (4680m). *Bharal* can be seen grazing the scant vegetation above the camp.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: RUBRANG LA TO MARKHA

1 day, 16km

A direct route to the Markha Valley. The climb to the **Rubrang La** (5020m) takes about two hours. The trail ascends through a gully, which opens out just below the pass. To the north are uninterrupted views of the Stok Range. There is a small spring line 3km below the pass, convenient if trekking from the Markha Valley. The trail descends into a large gorge that leads down to the confluence with the Markha River. **Markha village** (3770m) is 2km below the confluence on the north side of the valley.

Day 7: Base Zalung Karpo La to Camp via Zalung Karpo La

6 hours, 14km

Another challenging stage. Highlights include the views from the Zalung Karpo La that extend east across the vast region of Rupshu while to the north are the 6000m snow-capped peaks in the vicinity of Nimaling.

From camp head up the valley for 3km (past the turn-off to the Rubrang La) before ascending a small side gorge. Apart from a solitary rock cairn there is no other indication that this is the route to the pass. It's a steep ascent until the gorge widens out. From here the pass can be seen. Head up the trail following the steep switchbacks to the crest of the pass.

The **Zalung Karpo La** (5190m) is a double pass with a trail leading on one side to Rupshu (see the Markha Valley alternative trek, p66) with dramatic views of the ridges and rock spires that guard the route to Rupshu. We head in the opposite direction, at first along the ridge to the prayer flags and then down a steep side valley to the north that drops to a small gorge. Keep on down the gorge for 4km to a grassy sheltered campsite (4680m) – used by trekkers coming in the opposite direction from the Markha Valley en route to **Dat**.

Day 8: Camp to Thochuntse & Nimaling

5–6 hours, 16km

After the challenges of the previous days this is a relatively straightforward stage

leading to the regular trail on the Markha Valley trek (see p63) and the Nimaling Plains, the Kongmaru La and the Indus Valley.

Head down the broad valley initially crossing the main stream to the true right (east). The trail passes through a narrow gorge to reach a *mani* wall and stone shelter sometimes used by villagers from Hankar village. To the east the summit of **Kangyaze** (6400m) looms above the valley and although there is a short cut that leads directly to Nimaling, it is preferable to keep on down the main valley crossing the stream several times before reaching the confluence of the stream from the Zalung Karpo La and the river from Nimaling (4000m). Cross the bridge and then, instead of descending to Hankar village, turn up the valley to the established campsite at Thochuntse. By now you will be sufficiently fit to continue the same day to **Nimaling** and the base of the **Kongmaru La**.

Day 9: Nimaling to Shang Sumdo via Kongmaru La

6–7 hours, 18km

The final stage ascends the **Kongmaru La** (5150m) before the long and steep descent to the outlying fields and settlements of **Shang Sumdo**.

PHUGTAL GOMPA & SHINGO LA

Duration 6 days
Distance 95km
Difficulty moderate–demanding
Start Mune
Finish Rarig/Darcha
Nearest Town Padum
Public Transport bus/taxi
Summary One of the most popular treks in Zanskar, visiting Buddhist villages and gompas before crossing the Himalaya Range to Lahaul and the Kullu Valley.

Over the last three decades this has been one of the most popular treks in Zanskar. It also formed part of a classic trek from Lamayuru to Padum and then over the Shingo La that traversed the Zanskar and Himalaya Ranges.

Road developments in Zanskar have changed this and the trek over the Shingo La can nowadays be completed in less than a week. Yet the rewards are still there. The Shingo La is no lower or easier to cross than it was a generation ago, while the combination of Buddhist villages and ancient gompas still provide an enduring attraction for the first-time visitor to Zanskar.

There is no shortage of campsites and lodges while visiting the villages and gompas (of which Phugtal gompa is the highlight). However, trekkers without tents will face a dangerous disadvantage if crossing the Shingo La during inclement weather.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The Shingo La is normally open from early June to early October, although the winter snows remain on the pass for most of the season. An occasional storm in September may disrupt trekking plans.

What to Bring

While this trek is popular, there have been tragic accidents with groups of trekkers being caught by storms while crossing the Shingo La. A tent should be carried together with food and fuel supplies for three or four days. Snow gaiters are also useful, particularly early in the season.

Maps

Refer to *Ladakh/Zanskar (South)* trek section 1:150,000 published by Olizane and to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 3 Leh, Zanskar & Nubra Valley* for the northern section of the trek as far as Purne. For the southern sections, refer to *Sheet 5 Kullu Valley, Parbati Valley & Central Lahaul*. Also refer to Nelles Verlag 1:350,000 *Ladakh & Zanskar sheet* and the US military U502 series 1:250,000 *43-12 ref Martselang* for the stages as far as the Shingo La. For the stages south to Darcha, refer to *43-16 ref Palampur*.

Accommodation

There are basic lodges and/or parachute tents on most (but not all) stages of the trek. Lodges or tented accommodation is available at Mune and Reru, however, there is no accommodation at Itchar and you may need to go a further 7km to

Pupila to get a roof over your head. At Purne, there are a couple of lodges. There are either lodges or parachute tents at Tetha, Karu and Tanze, while Kargyak has a choice of lodges. Lakong, at the base of the Shingo La, has a parachute tent. Once over the Shingo La, there is no guarantee of accommodation until you reach the parachute tents at Jankar Sumdo. At Darcha there is a choice of lodges and tents.

Lodge charges vary between Rs 100 (at Kargyak) and Rs 200 (at Purne) per room plus food. If camping, expect to pay Rs 100 to pitch your tent.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

For travel to Padum, see Getting There & Away (p94). There is no bus service to Mune. Four-wheel drives are an expensive Rs 1500, but can occasionally be hired on a per-seat basis. From Rarig there are buses to Darcha (Rs 10, one hour) and onto Keylong (Rs 15, two hours) from where you can catch the onward connection to Manali (Rs 109, six hours).

Heading north, there are regular truck convoys that may provide transport to the Indus Valley and Leh.

THE TREK (see map p58–9)

Day 1: Mune to Itchar

2 hours, 8km

A short stage to take into consideration that most will have driven from Padum that morning. It is difficult to determine how long it will take for the road to extend to Purne, and updates on the construction need to be factored in when planning the initial stages of the trek.

The road section between Padum and **Reru** (3800m) is now complete. Beyond Reru the trail descends to the Reru River. Cross the bridge and head along the dirt road until it peters out. It then continues along the true right of the Tsarap River until it is opposite the village of **Itchar**. Cross the bridge over the Tsarap River and climb up to a comfortable campsite (3740m).

To further acclimatise climb up 150m to **Itchar** village (3900m). There is also an opportunity to explore the remote valley north of the village. A few hours can be spent heading up a narrow trail leading to pastures where the villagers take their animals in summer.

Day 2: Itchar to Purne

5–6 hours, 20km

As with the previous stage, road developments may soon undermine the tranquillity of the trek. Until then take time to appreciate the villages and settlements that flourish on the ridges high above the swirling waters of the Tsarap River.

Recross the bridge over the **Tsarap River** and continue for 2km until opposite the settlement of **Dorzong** (3800m). It is a further 5km to a potential campsite and parachute tent at **Pupila**. From here the gorge widens. Cross an impressive side gorge to the settlement of **Amu** (3820m) while the village of **Tsetang** is on the far side of the river. After another 1km the trail splits. Follow the lower trail to **Khalbok** (3760m) and a welcome tea stall, while the substantial village of **Cha** can be appreciated extending up the hillside on the far side of the river. Two kilometres beyond this point take the lower trail that winds down to the river and the bridge over to **Purne** (3820m) located just above the confluence of the Tsarap River and the Kargyak River.

SIDE TRIP: PHUGTAL GOMPA

4 hours, 10km return

This side trip is a highlight of the trek. Although it can be completed in a morning it is recommended to spend a full day and reserve two nights at the delightful camping site at Purne. The trail from Purne follows the true left bank of the Tsarap River for 4km before it reaches a bridge over the river. From the bridge it is a further 1km to Phugtal gompa (3950m).

The sight of the Phugtal gompa on the limestone cliff never fails to impress. The main Assembly Hall is carved out of a huge cave, with the monks' quarters scattered down the hillside. Also look for the ancient cypress tree on the cliff above the gompa. Inside the gompa is an inscription to Coso de Koros, one of the first Europeans to visit the Zanskar region and the first to translate the Buddhist texts from Ladakhi into English. A donation of Rs 100 is expected, to assist with facilities for the school, where students from the nearby Phugtal village receive an elementary education. Monks will also serve tea together with the ubiquitous butter tea and *tsampa* (roasted ground barley).

Day 3: Purne to Kargyak

6 hours, 18km

Beyond Purne the lower Kargyak Valley opens out and supports a number of settlements whose fields are fed by unseen snowfields and glaciers. Solar panels are also evident, vying with colourful Buddhist prayer flags for a place on the roofs.

From **Purne** head down to the **Kargyak River**, cross the bridge and slowly ascend to the trail that winds high above the river. The trail passes the settlement of **Yal** (3870m) before reaching a large and fertile plateau. This includes the village of **Tetha** (3900m) before heading along a trail marked by well-maintained chortens to the village of **Karu** (3950m). Substantial stone walls line the track, protecting the barley fields from straying pack animals. Beyond Karu the trail continues up the valley for 4km before descending to the river and a bridge over to **Tanze** (3900m) on the true left of the valley. There is a willow plantation project in a large enclosure, an example of initiatives sponsored by the J&K Forest department to reforest some of the more barren lands between here and Kargyak.

It is a further 4km to the village of **Kargyak** (4050m), the highest permanent settlement in the Zanskar region. A couple of the houses in the village provide accommodation and meals, while the campsite is immediately below the village alongside the Kargyak River.

Day 4: Kargyak to Lakong

4–5 hours, 13km

Immediately above Kargyak the true scale of this glacial valley can be appreciated with the huge rock peak known as Gumburanjun, (see boxed text Geological Observations in the Zanskar, p86), while to the south the valley is enclosed by the formidable snow peaks of the Himalaya Range. It's a rugged landscape that could be compared to Morocco or the Andean altiplano. The only true reminder that we are in the Himalaya is the occasional Buddhist chorten alongside the trail.

Remain on the true right of the valley as you continue across the yak-grazing pastures covered in edelweiss and other flowering species. After about 5km there is a side river to ford and then a further 3km to the base of impressive rock monolith known as **Gumburanjun**. After passing the rock face, it is a further 2km on to the shepherds' encampments, which are known as **Lakong** (4470m).

Just before the main alpine meadow, cross the small rock bridge over an upper tributary of the Kargyak River. There is also a parachute tent and campsite with unrivalled views up the valley to the Himalaya Range.

Day 5: Lakong to Rumjak via Shingo La

8 hours, 15km

A long and challenging stage that traverses the main Himalaya Range. Anticipate spectacular views of the 6000m peaks in the vicinity of the pass as well as a backdrop of hanging glaciers and snowfields a world apart from the villages and settlements in the Zanskar Valley.

The trail climbs steeply at first up a moraine ridge before crossing an alpine meadow that leads towards the base of the **Shingo La**. About 4km from Lakong, there is a river crossing over a torrent that flows from the glaciers north of the pass. In spring and early summer, there may be a snow bridge here, at other times wet boots are unavoidable.

The ascent to the Shingo La is not hard by Himalayan standards. It can be completed in 1½ to two hours across snowfields (early in the season) and scree slopes (from August onwards).

Distinctive rock cairns and prayer flags mark the **Shingo La** (5050m) although mule attendants may follow a route immediately to the west that is about 70m lower than the actual pass.

Views south from the pass give an indication of the terrain ahead. The configuration of the glacier to the south of the pass is constantly changing, and so is the trail. The descent route has changed a number of times over the last 30 years. The current trail leads to the true right of the ice and moraine, and includes a steep 400m descent to the glacial floor.

The trail continues on the true right of the broad glacial valley, descending gradually for 5km to 6km past several small campsites to a grassy area known as **Rumjak** (4390m).

Day 6: Rumjak to Rarig & Darcha

7–8 hours, 21km

After the exhilaration of the pass crossing this is a somewhat tiring stage. It includes a steep descent to Jankar Sumdo before heading on down the broad glacial valley to Rarig and the trailhead. This long stage can be shortened with an easy day to Jankar Sumdo. A dirt road is being extended to Jankar Sumdo although at present there is no road bridge over the river at Palamo.

It is a 5km descent through scant vegetation and across scree slopes to **Jankar Sumdo** (4100m). This stretch should take about three hours. Cross the bridge over the **Darcha River** to a large campsite and parachute tents. The trail continues on the true right of the valley, weaving through boulder fields and across several side streams and meagre grazing pastures to **Pal Lhamo** (3600m).

Cross the natural stone bridge high above the Darcha River to the true left of the valley and continue down to the village of **Rarig** (3500m). This is the current trailhead although the road can be avoided by taking the many shortcuts to **Darcha** (3350m). Many *dhabas* line the road and a campsite sits beside the river. There is also a police checkpoint where you will need to show your passport.

PHITSE LA & BARALACHA LA

Duration 8 days
Distance 106 or 113km
Difficulty demanding
Start Mune
Finish Kelong Sarai or Baralacha La
Nearest Town Padum
Transport truck/bus
Summary A more demanding alternative to the Phugtal Gompa & Shingo La trek, with two high passes en route to Lahaul and Himachal Pradesh.

Only a handful of trekkers cross the Phitse La each season. Apart from the first four days in the Zanskar Valley, this is essentially a wilderness trek – although shepherds from Kargyak occasionally graze their yaks on the north side of the pass.

The views are impressive to say the least. The approach to the Phitse La affords an unrivalled panorama of the rugged Zanskar Range while on the final stages of the trek savour views across the vast, windswept Lingti Plains

On reaching either Kelong Sarai or the Baralacha La, there is a choice of hitching a ride to Darcha and Keylong or extending the trek across the alpine pastures to Chandra Tal, before heading south over the Rohtang Pass to Manali and the Kullu Valley. See the Chandra Tal to Baralacha La trek for details.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The Phitse La is normally passable by early June, although there is snow on the pass for most of the season. The pass is open until early October. Occasional storms in September may disrupt trekking plans.

What to Bring

A tent is essential, while food and fuel supplies should be carried for at least four days, for the stages between Tanze and the Baralacha La. A length of rope is handy for the river crossing near the Lingti campsite.

Maps

Refer to the *Ladakh/Zanskar (South)* trek section 1:150,000 published by Olizane and the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 3 Leh, Zanskar & Nubra Valley* for the northern section of the trek to Purne. For the southern sections, refer to *Sheet 5 Himachal Pradesh (Kullu Valley, Parbati Valley & Central Lahaul)*. Also refer to the Nelles Verlag 1:350,000 *Ladakh & Zanskar sheet* and the US military U502 series 1:250,000 *43-12 ref Martselang* for the stages as far as the Phitse La. For the stages onto the Baralacha La, refer to *43-16 ref Palampur*.

Accommodation

There are basic lodges and/or parachute tents between Mune and Tanze. Beyond Tanze there is nothing until you reach the *dhabas* in the vicinity of Bharatpur. En route to Tanze, expect to pay Rs 100 to sleep in a parachute tent or lodge, or to pitch your tent for the night.

GEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS IN THE ZANSKAR

A trek across the Zanskar offers a wide range of geological features associated with the metamorphic rocks of the Higher Himalaya Crystalline (the high Himalaya) and the sedimentary rocks of the Tethyan Himalaya (the trans-Himalaya).

The contrast between the two geological units is evident when trekking between Padum and Kargyak. The Kargyak Valley partly follows the prominent fault – the Zanskar Shear Zone – that marks the limit of the Higher Himalaya Crystalline to the south and the Tethyan Himalaya to the north. The Himalayan Crystalline forms the rugged snow-capped peaks of the Himalaya Range, while the multicoloured sediments constitute the more smoothly shaped Zanskar Range.

Above the Zanskar Shear Zone, green and grey shales, grey sandstones and yellowish dolomite represent the oldest sediments of the Tethyan Zone. The green volcanic rocks that are clearly visible near Phugtal gompa or white quartzites near Tanze and Kargyak are distinctly younger.

However, the most striking feature on the trek to the Shingo La is the huge Gumburanjun peak (see Day 4), about 10km southwest of Kargyak village. The mountain is almost entirely formed by white granite, although some sedimentary beds floating in the granite are still recognisable. By Himalayan standards the granite is very young – just 22 million years old – and resulted from the melting process during the recent formation of the Himalaya. While the peak can be admired from afar, it is not recommended to get too close to the rock face. Rock falls are frequent, as they are in many other areas of the Zanskar.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

For travel to Padum see Getting There & Away (p94). If travelling from the Baralacha La onto Leh it is best to get a lift in a truck as most of the buses will be full. If travelling to Manali, the truck option to Keylong is again the best option, from where several buses travel to Manali daily (Rs 109, six hours).

THE TREK (see map p58–9)

Days 1 to 3: Mune to Purne

3 days, 28km plus 10km return to Purne

See Days 1 & 2 (p83) of the Phugtal Gompa & Shingo La trek, plus take a day to visit the Phugtal gompa.

Day 4: Purne to Tanze

5 hours, 13km

Follow Day 4 (p84) of the Phugtal Gompa & Shingo La trek but camp below the village of Tanze (3990m) for the night.

Day 5: Tanze to Phitse La Base Camp

5 hours, 15km

Above Tanze take in dramatic views of the Kargyak Valley before ascending a secluded valley enclosed by high ridges and hanging glaciers that define the Zanskar Range.

Shortly after Tanze, the trail to the Phitse La heads up a side gorge that ascends steeply for 500m out of the Kargyak Valley. A short walk back across a large plateau (4450m) affords fine views of the upper Kargyak Valley back to Purne. There is a good campsite a few kilometres up the valley – in fact, the best between Tanze and the pass. However, to make an early start over the Phitse La, continue up the valley for 6km. To reach the base of the pass, cross the river flowing from the Phitse La and continue on the true left of the valley for 3km before recrossing the river. It is then a further 2km to 3km to a small grassy campsite (4700m) alongside the river.

Day 6: Phitse La Base Camp to Chumik Marpo via Phitse La

5–6 hours, 11km

A challenging stage that traverses an outer rim of the Zanskar Range. The pass affords views of the Himalayan peaks that peer above the Kargyak Valley, while to the north the fold upon fold of the Zanskar Range stretch to the horizon.

Continue alongside the river for a further 3km to the **Phitse La** base (4700m) before a steep 400m ascent across scree and

snowfields to the pass. From camp to the pass allow two to three hours.

From the **Phitse La** (5250m) there are magnificent views of the hanging glaciers in the immediate vicinity of the pass, while for the best views of the **Zanskar Range** climb the small ridge northeast of the pass. The initial descent follows the course of a stream flowing from the pass that forges a course through steep scree slopes on down to a potential campsite (if trekking from the Baralacha La). Although the nearby ridges extend up to 5000m, we have seen a wide range of wildflowers that somehow survive in this altitude even though it is under snow for most of the year. It's a further steep descent to the open grazing areas of **Chumik Marpo** (4750m). Yaks are tended by villagers from Tanze and also from Kargyak who access the meadows by an alternative pass directly above their village.

Day 7: Chumik Marpo to Lingti Camp

5 hours, 14km

A relatively easy stage down to the vast Lingti plains. This region also marks the limit of the Gaddi shepherds' migration with their flocks from the verdant valleys in the vicinity of Manali in Himachal Pradesh.

An early start is imperative in order to cross a tributary of the **Lingti River**. Follow the trail down the true left of a verdant valley until it reaches an impressive gorge. The trail then drops steeply, crossing the main stream to the true right of the gorge before winding around to the confluence of a major tributary of the Lingti River (that will eventually flow to Phugtal and Padum (see Remote Rupshu trek, this page). Cross the river with care, and if in doubt as to the best place to ford then head up the side valley for 1km or so to where the tributary widens. Beyond the tributary head down the broad Lingti Valley. The trail passes a number of *mani* walls that have not been maintained, while there is no end of juniper bushes thriving on the otherwise barren scree slopes. To reach one of a series of campsites (approximately 4400m) on the upper Lingti Plains will necessitate crossing at least two or three side rivers that may involve wet boots.

Day 8: Lingti Camp to Kelong Sarai & Baralacha La

5–6 hours, 15 or 22km

The Tsarap River is formed at the confluence of the Lingti River and a tributary flowing from the Baralacha La. This also marks the border between Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh. In the distance are the distinctive 'fixed camps' at Sarchu – and a popular overnight halt when driving from Manali to Leh. The Lingti Plains were also an important meeting place for caravans where traders from Zanskar and the Indus Valley met villagers from Lahaul and the Kullu Valley.

From camp, the trail heads south across the Lingti Plains. It's a matter of just putting your head down and counting off the kilometres. The trail continues for about 10km to a sheltered campsite and a Gaddi shepherd encampment. It is a further 1km before the trail meets the Manali to Leh road at Kelong Sarai (4510m). From there it is an hour's walk (you can avoid most of the road) to the *dhabas* and tented accommodation known as **Bharatpur** (a misleading name that was probably assigned by some homesick Indian soldiers from Rajasthan).

If considering extending the trek (see Chandra Tal & Baralacha La trek, p118) then it is a 7km walk up the road to the **Baralacha La** (4950m), a double pass, with the Bhaga Valley extending to the southwest and the Chandra Valley to the southeast. From the northern pass continue on for 1km or two to some delightful campsites in the vicinity of Baralacha La (South), and the route to Chandra Tal (see Chandra Tal & Baralacha La trek, p118).

REMOTE RUPSHU

Duration 6 days
Distance 107km
Difficulty demanding
Start Mune
Finish Leh–Manali Road, 24km north of Sarchu
Nearest Town Padum
Public Transport truck/bus
Summary A trek linking the villages and settlements of Zanskar in the remote region of Rupshu

This is a worthy and exciting alternative to the Shingo La and the Phitse La. The trek follows the course of the Tsarap River as it forges its way through the Zanskar Range. For the well-prepared trekker, keen to explore ill-defined trails and willing to cross two passes in the vicinity of 5000m, the rewards are there. Anticipate unrivalled views of the Zanskar Range, while the wild and windswept landscape of Rupshu will appeal to the intrepid trekker.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The Gotunda La is normally passable by early June, although there is snow on the pass for most of the season. The pass is open until early October. River crossing may be problematic in July and August so it is necessary to double check that the bridges are in place over the Tantak River before continuing past Phugtal.

What to Bring

A tent is a must, while food and fuel supplies should be carried for at least four days.

Maps

Refer to the *Ladakh/Zanskar (South)* trek section 1:150,000 published by Olizane and to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 3 Leh, Zanskar & Nubra Valley* for the northern section of the trek to Purne. For the southern sections, refer to *Sheet 5 Himachal Pradesh (Kullu Valley, Parbati Valley & Central Lahaul)*. Also refer to the Nelles Verlag 1:350,000 *Ladakh & Zanskar* map and the US military U502 series 1:250,000 *43-12 ref Martselang* for the stages as far as Phugtal. For the stages to the Gotunda La to Sarchu, refer to *43-16 ref Palampur*.

Accommodation

There are basic lodges and/or parachute tents as far as Phugtal. En route expect to pay Rs 100 to sleep in a parachute tent or lodge, or to pitch your tent for the night. Beyond Phugtal there is nothing until you reach the trail head.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

For travel to Padum, see Getting There & Away (p94). From Sarchu (or at least where the trail head meets the road north of Sarchu, you may get a seat (Rs 100) on one of the buses going to or coming from Leh. Trucks are a good alternative as most buses are full.

THE TREK (see map p58–9)

Days 1 to 2: Mune to Phugtal

2 days, 28km to Purne plus 5km to Phugtal

See Days 1 & 2 (p83) of the Phugtal Gompa & Shingo La trek as far as Purne. After a night at Purne an extra day is recommended to complete the short stage up the Tsarap River gorge to Phugtal with ample time to visit the gompa. To reach Phugtal gompa follow the well-defined trail leading high above the river traversing the scree slopes for 4km before winding down to a bridge to the true right (east) side of the river. The trail then winds up and around to a vantage point and the first incomparable views of this ancient gompa. There is a well-appointed lodge and a campsite (3900m) just below the gompa.

Day 3: Phugtal to Base Kontse La & Tantak

8 hours, 15km

Beyond Phugtal the trail enters wild gorge country that follows the course of the Tsarap River. After establishing camp at the base of the Kontse La be sure to visit Tantak, one of the most remote settlements in Zanskar.

There will be a few delays in the vicinity of Phugtal gompa (3950m) as the mules will have to be off-loaded to negotiate the labyrinth of narrow alleyways that form the trail directly beneath the Assembly Hall. The trail then winds above the course of the river for 6km to the confluence of a small side gorge. A tiring 150m ascent out of the gorge is followed by an equally tiring descent back to the course of the river. On the way down there is a small campsite alongside gnarled cedar trees. It's a rough trail hewn out of the scree slopes that may cause a few problems for laden mules until the trail meets the side gorge leading up to Tantak.

After 2km cross the wooden bridge to the true left of the gorge. Continue 1km further where the gorge widens and gain the first views of Tantak village. It is recommended to camp (4070m) in the willow thicket just above the gorge and the trail leading to the Kontse La. Later that day head up to **Tantak**

village (4100m), a settlement consisting of about six houses and a tiny gompa. From here it is also possible to appreciate the location of the Kontse La and the route to be followed the next day.

Day 4: Base Kontse La to Homuch via Gotunda La

8–9 hours, 23km

A demanding day by any standards. To bypass the Tsarap River gorge necessitates crossing two passes – the Kontse La and the Gotunda La that are both in the vicinity of 5000m. The commanding views extend beyond the gorge to the endless snow-capped peaks and ridges of the Zanskar Range.

The ascent to the Kontse La will take the best part of three hours. To reach the pass head up the side gorge for about 500m and then watch out for rock cairns. The trail turns south up a side valley. About two-thirds of a the way up there are views across to **Tantak** and the ridges leading to the Stongde La and the route back to the Zanskar Valley and Padum.

The **Kontse La** (4810m) is hardly a pass. It is more a dip on a ridgeline that heads towards the main pass – the Gotunda La. The view towards the Zanskar Range provides a magnificent backdrop for the three-hour trek to the second pass. The trail then leads across a plateau that at first rounds the contours (with little loss of altitude) before a short steep climb to the **Gotunda La** (5040m).

From the pass there is a steep descent for 1km to a potential campsite (that is, a flat area with a trickle of water) before heading on for a further two to three hours, to complete the big day, down to the deserted settlement at Homuch alongside the **Tsarap River**.

Homuch (3940m) consists of two deserted houses, a chomo gompa (long abandoned) and a willow plantation showing at least some signs of life.

Day 5: Homuch to Satok

6–7 hours, 16km

A day to explore the wild and remote reaches of the Tsarap River as it forges its way towards the main axis of the Zanskar Range. The trail leads through Khampa settlements that are deserted in the summer when the herdsmen take their flocks of sheep, goats and yaks to the higher pastures of Rupshu.

Follow the course of the **Tsarap River** along a trail that leads about 50m above the river. After 8km it reaches the confluence of the Zara River – a river with a vast catchment that extends north to the Khardung La. The river level in July and August may necessitate using a rope, so an early start is imperative.

Beyond the confluence the gorge opens out to a broad glacial valley. The settlement of **Muneleh** (3980m) is about 6km above the Zara River confluence (1½ hours) before you continue to **Satok** (4040m), the most substantial winter settlement in the valley. There is a good camping spot alongside the side stream where the willow trees provide a modicum of shade.

Day 6: Satok to Tsok Mesik & Trailhead

8 hours, 18km

The wilderness landscape becomes even more impressive on the final stage of the trek with the peaks of the Baralacha Range looming above the head of the valley. At Tsok Mesik there is a tranquil campsite that is also the turning-off point for the trail leading north to Dat and the Indus Valley (see alternative trek, p90).

There is a gradual climb to a ridge 350m above the course of the Tsarap River. Rock cairns mark the trail that includes a 200m descent before a series of tiring ascents to a ridge (4400m) and a commanding view of the Tsarap River and the camp Tsok Mesik. It takes a further 1½ hours to reach **Tsok Mesik** (4200m) located at the confluence of a major side gorge. Camp could be established here (with time to explore the side gorge) before making an early start the next day to reach the highway and get a lift to Leh.

It's a further three hours to follow a mostly undulating trail alongside the river course to the trailhead. There is no shortage of potential campsites, with willow trees, brushwood and tiny streams flowing from side gorges. Reaching the Manali to Leh road comes as a bit of a shock. Unless there is a steady stream of trucks and buses it is not seen until completing the final short ascent from the river course. From this point it is 24km to **Sarchu** – far too long to walk

if heading towards Manali, so getting a lift is imperative.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: TSOK MESIK TO DAT & INDUS VALLEY

3 days to Dat, 7 days to Shang Sumdo/Hemis

High on the wish list for those wishing to get beyond the more popular trails of Zanskar.

From Tsok Mesik there is a steep ascent to the **Marang La** (5300m) before crossing a series of high ridges above the Zara River that eventually lead to the camp at Lun at the base of the Yar La. The trails are followed by both Khampa as well as by Tibetan shepherds who have assumed grazing rights over this vast, almost arid, landscape. From Lun it is a quite steep ascent to the **Yar La** (4950m). From the pass there are views north to the snow-capped peaks that rise above the **Nimaling** Plains, while to the east the views extend across the Rupshu region to snow-capped ranges in the vicinity of Tso Kar and Tso Morari before heading down to the settlement of **Dat**. Allow a further stage to the base of the **Zalung Karpo La** (5190m), a day to cross the pass, and one to reach the Nimaling Plains. On the final stage traverse the **Kongmaru La** (5150m) and complete a challenging traverse from Zanskar to Leh that all but avoids current road developments.

MORE TREKS

Leh & the Indus Valley

LIKIR TO TEMISGAM

2 days (3 days optional), 35km, easy

A trek over low passes following a former trade route north of the Indus Valley. This two-day trek – that can easily be extended to three – is a popular introduction to trekking in Ladakh. The only drawback is that a considerable portion of the trek is along a dirt road, although you are only likely to see a handful of vehicles each day.

From the gompa at Likir follow the road up and over the first small pass – the Phobe La (3600m) to the settlement of **Sumdo**. There follows another gradual ascent up a dry side valley to the village of Yanthang and an option of heading down valley for a few hours to visit Rizong gompa. Alternatively, visit Rizong on the second day and have a short day to Hemis Shukpachu and the third to Temisgam and back to Leh.

From Yanthang it takes an hour to ascend the Sarmanchan La (3700m) leading over to the substantial village of Hemis Shukpachu – named after the nearby cedar grove (*shukpa* meaning cedar) – set amid an oasis of barely fields in an otherwise barren landscape. There are two further small passes to cross including the **Lago La** (3750m) – literally 'a pass of no consequence', and tell that to anyone who has struggled up the switchbacks in the midday heat – to reach the fertile fields of Temisgam.

There are regular buses from Leh to Likir (Rs 30, two hours). From Temisgam there is a chance of getting a ride in a truck although best to factor in walking 3km down to the Indus Valley and the main Kargil to Leh highway, where there are plenty of buses and trucks to Leh (Rs 40, four hours). Get off at Saspool if detouring to **Alchi**.

Padum & the Zanskar Valley

KANG LA TRAVERSE

7 days, 108km, demanding

One of the most challenging traverses of the Himalaya with spectacular views and a 28km descent of the Miyar Glacier. A fine alternative for the well-prepared trekker looking for a challenging alternative to the Shingo La.

From **Padum** drive or trek to Bardan gompa before completing the 4km to the confluence of the Temsasa Tokpo. Head up the side gorge to a few camps in the vicinity of 4000m. The climb to the base of the Kang La takes around six hours ascending scree slopes and tiny meadows to a small grassy clearing (4800m). The camp is just above the confluence of two valleys – the valley to the west leading to the **Poat La** while the valley to the southeast leads to the Kang La.

The approach to the pass leads through boulder and snowfields to the crest of the **Kang La** (5450m) enclosed by 6000m peaks and high rock cliffs. The pass also defines the border between Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh. Avoid the obvious crevassed sections when crossing the pass, before a gradual descent to the Miyar Glacier. At least one camp is necessary on the glacier before heading on down to the terminal moraine and a sheltered camp (4200m).

Follow the shepherd trails across alpine pastures where the Gaddi shepherds graze their flocks during the summer en route to the **Gumbah Nullah** (4050m). There are more meadows to cross before descending to the village of **Tharang**. It's a further few hours down to **Urgos** (3250m) where the rows of *mani* walls and chortens reflect a deep-seated Buddhist heritage that still maintains strong ties with Zanskar.

On the final day, the trail leads through pea and maize fields to the villages of **Churput**, **Karpat** and the trail head at **Chamrat** (2950m). At present the road is being slowly extended up the Miyar Valley so adjust your itinerary accordingly.

From Chamrat take a bus to **Udaipur** (Rs 30, two hours) in the Chenab Valley from where there are buses to **Keylong** (Rs 109, six hours) and onward connections to **Manali** and the Kullu Valley.

UMASI LA TRAVERSE

6 days, 95km, demanding

Follow a remote route over the Himalaya Range to Buddhist communities and Hindu villages in secluded Pardar Valley.

From Padum either trek or drive the 9km to **Sani** – the oldest monastery in Zanskar. Beyond Sani trek along the road for 2km to the Tungri bridge (and the road to Kargil). Do not cross the bridge but continue to **Ating** village and follow the dirt road to Zongkul gompa (3800m). The following day head up the Zongkul Tokpo to a hanging valley coming from the west. Ascend the steep moraine to a wide glacial valley leading to a grassy campsite (4400m) at the base of the pass. Traversing the **Umasi La** is demanding, and care should be taken when negotiating the glaciers on both side of the pass. Initially ascend a broad glacier before heading up a narrow gully to the crest of the pass. The **Umasi La** (5340m) is a small gap in the cliff wall set amid high mountains. From the pass a steady descent leads to a large snowfield and huge rock overhang (4890m) where the porters often insist on staying for the night. It will be a cold start the next morning down to the main glacial floor with an ill-defined trail through the boulders to the terminal moraine. It's then a steep descent to a beautiful alpine valley set beneath the peak of **Kishtwar Shivling**. Camp at the meadow at **Suncham** (3250m) and share company with Bakraval shepherds and their huge flocks of sheep and goats. A short stage to the village of **Marchel** (2790m) provides an opportunity to appreciate the Buddhist culture and close ties with Zanskar.

Today is a long one, taking in views of the Pir Panjal before heading down through conifer and oak forest and past Hindu villages to the trail head and small bazaar at **Gularbagh** (2250m) just above the confluence of the Pardar and Chenab Rivers. People here are of Ladakhi origin, traders who originally settled in the upper Pardar Valley.

Allow at least two days to get to Manali. From Gularbagh it is possible to get a truck going up the Chenab Valley as far as the administrative centre at Kilar from where there is a daily bus to **Udaipur**. From Udaipur take the bus to **Keylong** and **Manali** and the Kullu Valley. Do not consider travelling down the Chenab Valley to **Kishtwar** as the region is still subject to separatist activity.

TOWNS & FACILITIES

KARGIL

☎ 019085 / alt 2187m / pop 9900

At the confluence of the Suru and Drass Rivers, Kargil is a Muslim region with a sizeable Shia presence. Most tourists will encounter the main bazaar and the labyrinth of alleyways leading to the river, and try get a good night's rest before the long drive to Padum the following day

Information

The **Tourist Reception Centre** (☎ 232328; off Main Bazaar) is behind the taxi stand. You can make bookings here for the J&KTDC Tourist Bungalows in Sanko, Panikhar and Rangdum. There is a number of internet outlets where you can also make STD and ISD calls. You can exchange US dollars at the State Bank of India, while some of the hotels may also be able to help.

Supplies & Equipment

Fruit, vegetables and other basics can be purchased in the bazaar. Tinned food and luxury items should be brought from Leh.

Sleeping & Eating

The **J&KTDC Tourist Bungalow** (☎ 232328; off the Main Bazaar; r from Rs 200) is next to the tourist office. However there is a nicer **annex** (☎ 232266) up the hill behind the hospital. There is also **Hotel Greenland** (☎ 232324/233388; r from Rs 400) and the **Hotel Siachen** (☎ 232221; s/d from Rs 1300/1800), both off the main bazaar. There is little to recommend the restaurants in Kargil. A number of small restaurants and *dhabas* in the main bazaar offer a limited range of dishes.

Getting There & Away

There is a daily bus service from Kargil to Leh (semi-deluxe/deluxe Rs 240/320, seven hours) and to Srinagar (semi-deluxe/deluxe Rs 240/320, eight hours). The daily bus to Padum is Rs 200 and takes 14 to 16 hours leaving at 2am or 3am and arriving in Kargil late that evening, a crass, irresponsible schedule that sometimes causes accidents. Hiring a taxi is a more expensive alternative and will cost around Rs 10,000 to Padum.

LEH

☎ 01982 / alt 3505m / pop 28100

The capital of Ladakh, Leh is in a small, fertile valley north of the Indus Valley. The town is also at the base of the Khardung La, the first of the high passes formerly crossed by trading caravans en route to the Karakoram Pass and the markets of central Asia. Although these trading routes have been closed since 1947, the Leh Bazaar retains much of its character, while the Victory Fort and King's Palace provide a fitting reminder of Ladakh's rich cultural history.

Information

The **Ladakh Bookshop** (Main Bazaar) is by far the best in Leh – in fact one of the best this side of Kathmandu – with a wide range of titles on the Himalaya. The **Leh Ling Bookshop** (Main Bazaar) includes a decent selection on Ladakh and Tibet. There is no shortage of internet cafes with facilities for making inexpensive STD and ISD calls. Mobile-phone users are less fortunate and it is advisable to access a local SIM card as cards even from elsewhere in India sometimes do not work here. The **State Bank of India** (Main Bazaar) and the **Jammu & Kashmir Bank** (Fort Rd), next to the taxi stand, both have ATMs while there are a number of outlets authorised for foreign exchange and cash advances.

Supplies & Equipment

It is advisable to purchase your food and fuel supplies in Leh. There is no shortage of fresh fruit and vegetables in the market together with a wide range of tinned and packed food. Supplies of flour, rice, sugar and cooking oil should also be purchased. Biscuits, basics and the occasional chocolate bar are all you can rely on buying at the roadhead or on the trail.

In recent years a few outdoor-gear outlets have opened selling waterproof gear and down jackets (normally brought from Kathmandu). However, its still advisable to bring your own tent, sleeping bag and insulated mat. Kerosene stoves and cooking gear can be purchased in Leh and may be sold back at a discount at the end of the trek. A rudimentary medical kit can also be compiled in Leh.

Trekking Agents

Leh has many agencies operating in summer. Most are run by knowledgeable staff.

Most agencies offer a complete package, including food, guide, cook, horses, tents and cooking equipment. Charges are around Rs 1600 to Rs 2000 per day per person for groups between two and four, Rs 1200 to Rs 1600 for larger groups.

Alternatively an agent may be able to organise packhorses or mules for you; budget for a minimum of Rs 300 per day per horse. Allow a few days for arrangements to be made as a message may have to be sent to the villager, who may need time to get the horses to the trailhead. It is also worth noting that prices will rise during the harvest period in September, when many villagers are fully engaged in their fields and have little inclination to undertake a trek.

Recommended agencies are **Adventure North** (☎ 252139; www.travelladakh.com; Hotel Dragon, Old Leh Rd); **Rimo Expeditions** (☎ 253348; www.rimoexpeditions.com; Hotel KanglaChen complex) and **Snow Leopard Trails** (☎ 252074; www.snowleopardtrails.com; Hotel KanglaChen complex).

Sleeping & Eating

There are numerous guesthouses and hotels in Leh. Most are run by friendly Ladakhi families and are often an extension of their own home. These places are generally clean, basic and of solid construction in the traditional two-storey, whitewashed style. Leh is not a big place, and you can check out a few hotels in an hour or so. You should be able to bargain for considerably less than the government rates outside July and August.

Guesthouses in the popular Changspa area include the **Asia Guest House** (☎ 253403; asiaguesthouse@yahoo.com; r Rs 300-500) while closer to Leh is the **Jigmet Guest House** (☎ 253563; jigmetguesthouse@yahoo.com; Upper Tukcha Rd; r from Rs 300). **Padma Guest House & Hotel** (☎ 252630; off Fort Rd; r from Rs 800) also has rooms. The more upmarket hotels include the **Omasila** (☎ 252119; Changspa; d from Rs 2000) and the **Lotus Hotel** (☎ 250265; hotellotus@vsnl.net; Upper Karzoo; d from Rs 2000) where rates include meals.

Most hotels have restaurants offering a wide range of dishes. In Central Leh on Fort Rd there is Summer Harvest and Tibetan Kitchen while in Changspa there is the peaceful Booklovers Retreat.

Getting There & Away

AIR

From Delhi, there are daily flights to Leh (Rs 12600, one hour) from June to September while at other times the flights are three or four times a week. The choice is between **Jet Airways** (☎ 250999; Main Bazaar), **Indian Airlines** (☎ 252076; Old Fort Rd) and **Kingfisher Airlines** (☎ 256429; Leh Airport). Indian Airlines also operate a twice-a-week service to Srinagar (Rs 6975) and once a week to Jammu (Rs 6300).

Remember that Leh is 3500m above sea level and the altitude will take its toll for the first couple of days. Take it easy and allow time for acclimatisation before trekking. When flying to Leh, note that flights are sometimes cancelled due to bad weather and this should be factored into your plans.

Security at Leh airport is tight and no hand baggage is allowed on flights leaving Leh. You can take your camera and laptop in the cabin, but only if the battery is placed in the hold. If you want aerial photographs there are no restrictions on cameras when flying from Delhi to Leh.

BUS

Manali

Local and long-distance buses leave from the main bus station located about 700m south of the main bazaar. The military road from Leh is normally open from mid-June to early October. It's a two-day drive. The **Himachal Pradesh Tourist Development Corporation** (HPTC; ☎ 253531) buses leave at 4.30am in order to reach Keylong that night before continuing to Manali the following day. The fare is Rs 1600 including accommodation in Keylong. The **Himachal Road & Transport Corporation** (HRTC; ☎ 252323) and the **Jammu & Kashmir State Road Transport Corporation** (J&KSRTC; ☎ 2472332) also offer buses departing at the same time for Rs 525 (accommodation in Keylong is extra). There are also a number of private bus operators that cost around Rs 1000 including tent accommodation in Sarchu or Keylong. These can be booked with any travel agency in Leh. Alternatively consider booking a seat in a 4WD for between Rs 1500 and Rs 2000. These can also be booked through travel agencies in Leh.

Kargil, Kashmir & Padum

The Leh to Srinagar road is usually open from early June until October. The trip takes two days with an overnight stop at either Kargil or Drass. The J&KSRTC buses leave from the main bus station at 6am for Kargil (ordinary/deluxe Rs 240/320, eight hours) and the two-day drive to Srinagar (Rs 490/620). Book the day before. Private buses that depart Leh on alternate days from June until October operate the most convenient service to Padum. The trip takes two days and costs Rs 500. If you decide to hire a taxi beware that you have to change vehicles in Kargil. Budget Rs 8000 to Kargil and a further Rs 10,000 from Kargil to Padum.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

The bus station south of Leh bazaar services most of the outlying villages and gompas. If you are carrying a lot of gear, arrive early, as space on the roof is often as limited as space inside the bus. Timetables are changed frequently, so it is best to enquire at the bus station the day before travel. Prices and

details are included in the Planning section for each trek. Taxis are a convenient alternative. There are fixed rates for such outings and you will have to bargain hard to get a discount.

PADUM

☎ 019082 / alt 3500m / pop 1500

On a plateau above the Stod and Tsarap Rivers, Padum is not a particularly inspiring town. It has many concrete buildings and heaps of fuel cans and engine parts, discarded here after the journey from Kargil. The outlying fields, settlements and gompas provide an attractive diversion.

Information

If you are making trek arrangements in Padum, allow a few days to organise porters or horses. Tondup Namgyal Lonpo and his helpful staff at the **Tourist Office** (☎ 245017) have many contacts and will happily assist you. There is a plan to upgrade the phone and internet services in Padum by late 2009. Until then the internet cafes are closed more often than not, and it is still difficult to make a telephone call. There are no ATMs or money-changing facilities. It is therefore necessary to change funds in Leh.

Supplies & Equipment

A limited range of supplies are available including biscuits, rice, flour, and a supply of eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables and kerosene. However, buy luxury items before leaving Leh.

Trekking Agents

Tondup Namygal Lonpo at the Tourist Office is a helpful first stop for assistance. There is also Zanskar Treks and Lingshet Zanskar Treks that have offices in the main bazaar.

Expect to pay somewhere around Rs 300 to Rs 400 per horse, depending on demand and season. The going rate for crossing the Kang La or Umasi La is Rs 400 to Rs 500 per porter per stage, plus assistance with their supplies, clothing and equipment.

Sleeping & Eating

The majority of trekkers choose to camp on arrival at Padum. The main campsite is opposite the tourist office although there are alternative sites about 1km along the road to Pipiting

Alternatively, there are a number of lodges, which are open just for the season. These include the **J&KTDC Tourist Bungalow** (☎ 245017; r Rs 200), in the same compound as the Tourist Office. **Hotel Ibex** (☎ 245012; s/d Rs 400/600) and the **Kailash Hotel** (☎ 245074; s/d Rs 400/600), both have comfortable rooms.

Both the hotels have good restaurants and other cafes offer momos and noodles.

Getting There & Away

For most, the timing of a trek out of Padum is determined by the opening of the road from Kargil over the Pentse La. The pass is normally cleared by June and generally remains open until late October.

BUS

During the season there is a daily bus (Rs 200) that leaves Padum at around 2am to complete the 14-hour drive to Kargil. Alternatively there is a mini-bus service (Rs 500) to Leh that takes two days with an overnight stop in Kargil. Getting a truck from the Kargil bazaar is an alternative. Truck prices are about the same as the bus. A seat in the cabin is more comfortable than sitting in the back. Either way, it's a long, dusty day.

TREKKING

For the intrepid, there are winter trails linking the Zanskar Valley with the Indus. From late January through February, villagers follow the route over the snow bridges that form in the depths of the gorges. When the ice begins to thaw, they follow a route over the Cha Cha La to the Khurna Valley and then trek down to its confluence with the Zanskar River. Here, there are places to ford the Zanskar River to reach Nimmu and Leh. The locals favour this route in the spring, until the snows on the Pentse La begin to thaw in May. The development of the road (see box text p74) will undermine the necessity to trek. It remains to be seen how the road will be maintained in the winter after heavy snow and landslides.

Getting Around

There are local buses to most of the trekking off points while taxis can be booked through the Padum Taxi Union. Prices and details are included in the Planning section for each trek.

Kashmir

HIGHLIGHTS

- Spend time on the famous **houseboats** (p100)
- Witness thousands of Hindu pilgrims undertaking their trek to the **Amarnath Cave** (p98)
- Share the renowned hospitality of **Gujar shepherds** (p98) in their summer encampments
- Undertake a trek following the alpine trails to **Harimukh** (p99)

When things are calm, Kashmir is no more dangerous then anywhere else in India. However, it is still imperative to get reliable information about the security situation before you travel. Be aware that travel insurance policies may not cover you if your government has issued specific advice against travel to Kashmir. Do not assume that travel is safe just because things are calm on the surface. Militants continue to stage periodic attacks on army installations, government offices and tourist attractions, markets and public buses. Expect regular searches when entering buildings and even on the trail, for example, when undertaking the Amarnath Trek. Note also that people involved in tourism are rarely likely to give an unbiased view. News reports of clashes and militant attacks can, however, provide a clue to the current situation.

For many, Kashmir still remains high on the Himalayan trekkers 'wish list'. Often described as 'Switzerland but in Himalayan proportions' it's not hard to understand why as it was considered a natural follow-on after completing a trek in Nepal.

Spending time on the renowned houseboats – until the outbreak of political instability – added an attractive dimension to the itinerary before heading off into the mountains. The trails through conifer forests and across meadows carpeted with wildflowers never seemed crowded. Campsites in forest glades beneath high peaks and hanging glaciers never failed to impress.

Yet this is no wilderness area. There are Gujar shepherds with their herds of lumbering buffalo, Bakraval with their flocks of sheep and goats or the occasional Hindu sadhu about to embark on a pilgrimage to the sacred Amarnath Cave.

Treks in this chapter are included for reference only – and in the hope that the political situation will improve before the next edition of this book.

HISTORY

The formation of the Maharajah's state in 1846 included the Hindu region of Jammu, the dominantly Muslim regions of Kashmir and Baltistan, and Buddhist Ladakh, which resulted in a huge Himalayan territory based more on political expediency than cultural design. The Dogras were to rule Kashmir for 101 years until Hari Singh, the last Maharajah, fled from his summer palace in Srinagar in 1947 soon after India's independence.

This resulted in protracted conflict between India and Pakistan until January 1949 when the UN established a tenuous border – known as the Line of Control – with two-thirds of Kashmir, including the fabled Vale of Kashmir, in India and the rest held by Pakistan. While the Hindus and Buddhists were generally content, with Indian rule most of the Muslim population in the Kashmir Valley grew increasingly restless when promises of increased autonomy failed to materialise.

By 1990 the state erupted in widespread unrest with most of the armed struggle being supported by insurgent groups from Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since 1996 regular state elections have led to an improvement in conditions matched by a significant reduction in the levels of violence across the Line of Control. This said, militant attacks on soldiers, civilians and domestic tourists have continued throughout the last decade and neither India nor Pakistan have succeeded in coming to any agreement as to the future of Kashmir.

ENVIRONMENT

The Kashmir Valley was, until recent geological times, a vast lake with a water level around 200m to 300m above the present valley floor. The pressure of water eventually cleared the blockage of silt and rocks to the north of the valley. What remains is one of the most fertile regions in northern India including the vast waters of Dal Lake and the capital of Srinagar built alongside the banks of the Jhelum River.

The Pir Panjal encloses the valley to the west and south, rising on average to elevations of around 5000m. To the north, the North Sonamarg Range provides an equally impressive backdrop, including the sacred peak of Harimukh (5135m). To the east, the Amarnath and Kolahoi Ranges rise above Sonamarg and Pahalgam. The ramparts of the Kashmir Valley are breached only once, to the north, where the Jhelum River forges through a narrow gorge en route to the Indus River.

To view wildlife involves heading to the hills where there are black and brown bear, forest leopards as well as urial, markhor and musk deer. The endangered Kashmir Stag can still be seen in the Dachigam Sanctuary close to Srinagar. For wildflower enthusiasts the alpine meadows support a wide array of flowering species particularly on the Alpine lakes trek to Harimukh (see p99).

CLIMATE

Kashmir has a modified monsoon climate. The pre-monsoon months are May and June. Although storms are experienced in July and August they are not so heavy or protracted as in Himachal or Uttarakhand. By early September settled conditions return and continue until the end of October when the first of the winter snow falls on the mountain ridges. The trekking season therefore extends from when the winter snows melt on the high passes in May and June and continues through July and August until the end of October.

PLANNING

For up-to-date news on the current political situation in Kashmir, refer to these useful news services: **Greater Kashmir** (www.greaterkashmir.com) and **Kashmir Times** (www.kashmirtimes.com).

KASHMIR TREKS

The following treks are out of the hill station in **Pahalgam** (2140m) in Kashmir. The brief information is provided as a starting point only in the hope that the situation does improve.

Kolahoi Glacier & Tar Sar

From Pahalgam, the trek follows a 4WD road along the West Lidder Valley to the village of **Aru** (2410m). It is a further short stage through conifer forest and past flowered meadows to the campsite at Lidderwat (3050m). From here, it is a full day's trek

Jammu & Kashmir
Tragbal
Panzgam
Bandipur
Harimukh (5135m)
GREAT HIMALAYA RANGE
Line of Control
Under Administration of Pakistan
Kargil
Drass
To Leh
Suru River
Wular Lake
Gangabal Lake
Sopur
Kangan
Sindh River
Sonamarg
Zoji La (3529m)
Sanku
Baramula
Gandarbal
Sumbal
Thajiwas Glacier
Kolahoi Glacier
Amarnath Cave
Kolahoi (5425m)
Harwan
Dachigam Wildlife Sanctuary
Aru
Panikhar
To Rangdum
To Uri
Srinagar
Dal Lake
Gulmarg
Pahalgam
Parachik Glacier
Kun (7087m)
Nun (7135m)
Under Administration of Pakistan
Jhelum River
Kashmir Valley
1A
Avantipur
Lidder River
Wadwan River
Punch
PIR PANJAL RANGE
Anantnag
Gaoran
Krish Nallah
Kulgam
Kokarnag
Verinag
See Ladakh Map p52
Jawahar Tunnel
Chatru
Banihal
Under Administration of Pakistan
KASHMIR
Ramsu
Pushal
Siwalik Hills
JAMMU & KASHMIR
Kishtwar
Gularbagh
Naoshera
Chenab River
Sanasar
Batote
Thatri
Doda
To Dharwas
Riasi
Vaishno Devi
Kud
Sudh Mahadev
Under Administration of Pakistan
Katra
PIR PANJAL RANGE
Bhadarwah
1A
Akhnoor
Udhampur
Ramnagar
See Himachal Pradesh Map pp103-4
Jammu
JAMMU
Jhelum River
Chamba
Sialkot
HIMACHAL PRADESH
Wazirabad
PAKISTAN
Chakki
Pathankot
Dharamsala
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Gujranwala
1
1A
Gaggal
The external boundaries of India on this map have not been authenticated and may not be correct.
PUNJAB
To Lahore
To Amritsar
To Jalandhar
Beas Dam

to view the impressive peak and glacier of **Kolahoi** (5452m), passing a number of Gujar-shepherd encampments en route. After returning to Lidderwat, it is a further day to the alpine lake of Tar Sar (3900m); the trail crosses a series of alpine meadows to the shepherd camp at Seikwas (3430m) before ascending to this glacial lake with fine views of the summit ridges of Kolahoi.

Retrace the route to Lidderwat. The final stage from Lidderwat to Pahalgam can be completed in a long morning with time to catch the bus back to **Srinagar** the same day.

Sumbal & Sindh Valley

Follow the previous route to reach Tar Sar and camp overnight at Seikwas (3430m). The following stage heads up an enclosed valley to the Sonamous Pass (3960m). There follows a steep and tiring descent (difficult under snow in early spring) to the Gujar settlement at Sonamous (3340m).

From Sonamous, an ill-defined trail descends through mixed forest to the outlying villages and fields of the Sindh Valley. It's then on to the rice paddies and cornfields of **Sumbal** village, where a bus goes to **Srinagar** or **Sonamarg** at the head of the Sindh Valley.

Amarnath Cave & Mahagunas Pass

From Pahalgam, the trail follows a 4WD track along the East Lidder Valley to the campsite at Chandanwadi (2900m). The second stage commences with a steep climb to the ridge known as Pisu Top (3390m) before heading across the alpine meadows and the gradual ascent to Sheshnag (3720m), a glacial lake set beneath the snow-capped peaks of Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma. There are magnificent views of these peaks on the following stage as the trail ascends to Mahagunas Pass (4270m) before the long, gradual descent to Panchtarni (3450m).

From Panchtarni, it takes several hours to reach the **Amarnath Cave** (4050m), following the trail up the Amarvati Valley. The cave is set within a vast limestone cliff-face in which a huge, ice stalagmite symbolises the power of Shiva. The return stages from Panchtarni to Pahalgam can be completed in two days.

Suru Valley (Ladakh) via Boktol Pass

From Pahalgam the first two stages follow the route of the Amarnath pilgrimage as far as Sheshnag (3720m). The next stage involves a steep climb to the Gul Gali (4410m), a pass with fine views of the Great Himalaya Range. There follows a steep descent to the shepherd encampment at Permandal (3610m).

Head down the upper reaches of the Warvan Valley before entering the Kanital Valley. Tumbling waterfalls and tiny birch groves characterise the route to the extensive meadow of Humpet (3400m). A short stage follows to the shepherd encampment at Kanital (3680m).

THE AMARNATH TREK

The trek to the Amarnath Cave is the most important pilgrimage in Kashmir. It is timed to coincide with the Shavan full moon (July/August). In spite of the political unrest, about 20,000 Hindu pilgrims from throughout India trek to the cave to view the ice statue that symbolises the presence of Lord Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction.

There are many legends regarding the discovery of the cave, but little historical fact. In all probability, it was discovered as shepherds wandered the valley in search of fresh grazing areas. Not only is the cave an ideal refuge for meditation, but it is also close to one of the sources of the Jhelum River, an important tributary of the Indus River. According to legend, Shiva related his theory of reincarnation to his consort Parvati in the cave on a full-moon night. A huge ice statue (or stalagmite) – said to wax and wane with the moon – formed in the cave. It represents the lingam, a symbol of Shiva, the source of creation, while the huge size of the cave symbolises Parvati and the vast womb of the universe.

The Indian government makes elaborate plans to ensure the smooth running of the pilgrimage, which for the last few seasons has been incident free.

HARIMUKH ALPINE LAKES TREK

Between 1976 and 1989 this trek to the sacred peak of Harimukh via the lakes of Vishen Sar and Krishen Sar was one of the most popular in Kashmir. In the last few years a handful of trekkers (including the author) have undertaken this trek with no unforetold consequences. Nonetheless it is imperative to check out the latest situation with the **J & K Mountaineering & Trekking Office** (Tourist Reception Centre) Srinagar, before heading off.

The trek commences at **Sonamarg** (2740m), a four-hour bus ride from Srinagar. On arrival it is recommended to spend a night camping at the nearby meadows beneath the **Thajiwas Glacier** to allow time to complete arrangements for mules (that can sometimes be in short supply during the Amarnath Yatra season) as well as to purchase provisions.

The easy to moderate trek commences with a gradual ascent to alpine ridges that afford magnificent views extending to the Zoji La – the road pass over the main **Himalaya Range** – leading to Ladakh. The trail then leads through silver-birch forest to a delightful camp at the base of the Nichanni Pass (3620m). The next day involves crossing the **Nichanni Pass** (4080m) before descending gradually to the lakes of **Vishen Sar** (3570m) and **Krishen Sar** (3580m). The meadows en route are carpeted with a startling array of wildflowers and it comes as no surprise that so many of the colour plates in the definitive *Flowers of the Himalaya* are taken here. Also allow time to engage the local Fishing Inspector, a wily character who, for a small consideration, will volunteer to catch trout from the deep silent waters of Krishen Sar.

The climb to the **Vishen Sar Pass** (4070m) on the third day will test the resolve of less hardy souls but the views back down to the lakes and across to the granite peaks that stretch to Sonamarg fully compensate. The trail then leads down, steeply in places, to the Gujar-shepherd encampments below the idyllic lake of **Gad Sar** (3800m).

The initial ascent on the fourth day is pure delight across open meadows (with further recourse to the wildflower guidebook) to reach the spectacular camp at **Megandob** (3610m) with a bird's eye view down the Sindh Valley to the upper reaches of the Vale of Kashmir.

An early start on the fifth day is essential to ensure uninterrupted views of the sacred peak of **Harimukh** (5135m) that rises above the serene waters of **Gangabal** (3510m). It is not hard to understand why Harimukh was traditionally revered by the Hindus living in the **Kashmir Valley**. Its impressive position on the northern flanks of the Kashmir Valley would have made it a natural attraction for the pilgrim. Indeed, it has been said that regular pilgrimages were made to the base of Harimukh and Gangabal long before the Amarnath pilgrimage gained popularity.

A rest day alongside the banks of Gangabal or the nearby lake of **Nundkol** is recommended before the stage that includes a steep descent through conifer forest to the ancient Hindu temple at **Narranag** (2150m) with time to catch the bus back to Srinagar the same day.

Allowing for a rest day at Gangabal, the one week trek is highly recommended and can justifiably be described as one of the great short treks, not just in Kashmir but anywhere in the Himalaya.

The trail from Kanital heads to the true left of the valley and ascends the terminal moraine. The route to the pass is then quite straightforward across the glacier, although take care to avoid the crevassed areas just below the Boktol Pass (4860m). From the pass, it is a long haul down to the meadow at Donara (3780m) before a short stage to **Panikhar** (3350m) and the Suru Valley. The river from which the valley takes its name flows south to north, a peculiarity of the left bank tributaries of the Indus. Onward transport by bus or truck is available to Kargil or Padum.

TOWNS & FACILITIES

SRINAGAR

☎ 01902 / alt 1750m / pop 971,000

Situated on the banks of the Jhelum River, Srinagar has attracted armies, traders and travellers for centuries. In the 1990s the city was almost deserted by tourists, but since 2000 there has been a steady increase of mostly Indian tourists who have helped to revive the once-flagging economy. Yet

sporadic militant attacks on domestic tourists has undermined any sustained confidence necessary to ensure that Srinagar returns to the pre-1990 heydays. The trickle of foreign trekkers has been less affected, although it would be foolhardy to visit Srinagar without checking the latest security update.

Information

The **Tourist Reception Centre** (☎ 2456291; www.jktourism.org; Residency Rd) has helpful staff and brochures. The **Kashmir Bookshop** (Sherwani Rd) stocks a range of titles on the Himalaya. There are plenty of internet cafes around Dalgate and on Residency Rd, as well as places to make STD and ISD calls. However, making mobile calls can be a problem without a local SIM card. There are many ATMs and banks including the Jammu & Kashmir Bank where you can exchange foreign currency. Budget for your trek before leaving Srinagar, as changing money in Pahalgam can be a problem, and there are no facilities in Sonamarg.

Supplies & Equipment

There is a wide variety of fresh and tinned food in Srinagar, and no shortage of supplies in either Pahalgam or Sonamarg. There is a premium on good-quality trekking gear and it is advisable to bring your own sleeping bag, insulated mat and tent.

Trekking Agents

Most of the former trekking agents now deal with regular tourism and ticketing. Until demand picks up, using a reliable houseboat owner to make the arrangements is probably the best option. Budget Rs 1500 to Rs 2000 per day for an inclusive trek. However, check out the guide's experience and background before parting with your money. Alternatively contact the J&K Mountaineering Office in the Tourist Reception Centre.

Sleeping & Eating

Staying on a houseboat on Dal Lake or the smaller Nagin Lake is one of the main reasons why tourists visit Kashmir. It's not hard to understand why. The flat-bottomed boats come complete with bedrooms and sitting rooms and a verandah. Most are run by individual families who provide home-cooked meals and *shikara* (wooden boat) trips to the shore and around the lake. Government rates range from Rs 700 to Rs 2000 a day with meals included. However, prices vary and discounts can be negotiated. For meals when not on the houseboat visit **Ahdoo's Hotel** (Residency Rd) for the best curries in town.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Indian Airlines (☎ 2450247), **Jet Airways** (☎ 2480801), **Kingfisher** (☎ 2450 0035), are some of the major airlines that operate between Kashmir and Delhi (from Rs 10,270, 1¼ hours). A taxi to the airport costs Rs 400. Allow 40 minutes from town plus at least an hour to clear security before checking in.

BUS/TRAIN TO DELHI

Deluxe government buses run by J&KTDC (Rs 215) leave from the stand next to the Tourist Reception Centre. They take 10 hours to Jammu stopping at the railway head at Udhampur en route to connect with one of the overnight trains to Delhi. These include the Jammu Mail that departs Udhampur at 2.40pm and the Shalimar Mail departing Jammu at 9pm. Fares are Rs 950/670/250/160 in 2A/3A/sleeper/2nd class. Online reservations should be made before leaving Srinagar. The trains are usually heavily booked so allow as much advance notice as possible.

BUS TO PAHALGAM & SONAMARG

Deluxe buses run daily to Pahalgam (Rs 120, two hours) and to Sonamarg (Rs 170, three hours).

TAXI

Taxis are more convenient if you have heaps of baggage, but they are more expensive. Budget Rs 1800 to Pahalgam and Rs 1600 to Sonamarg.

Himachal Pradesh

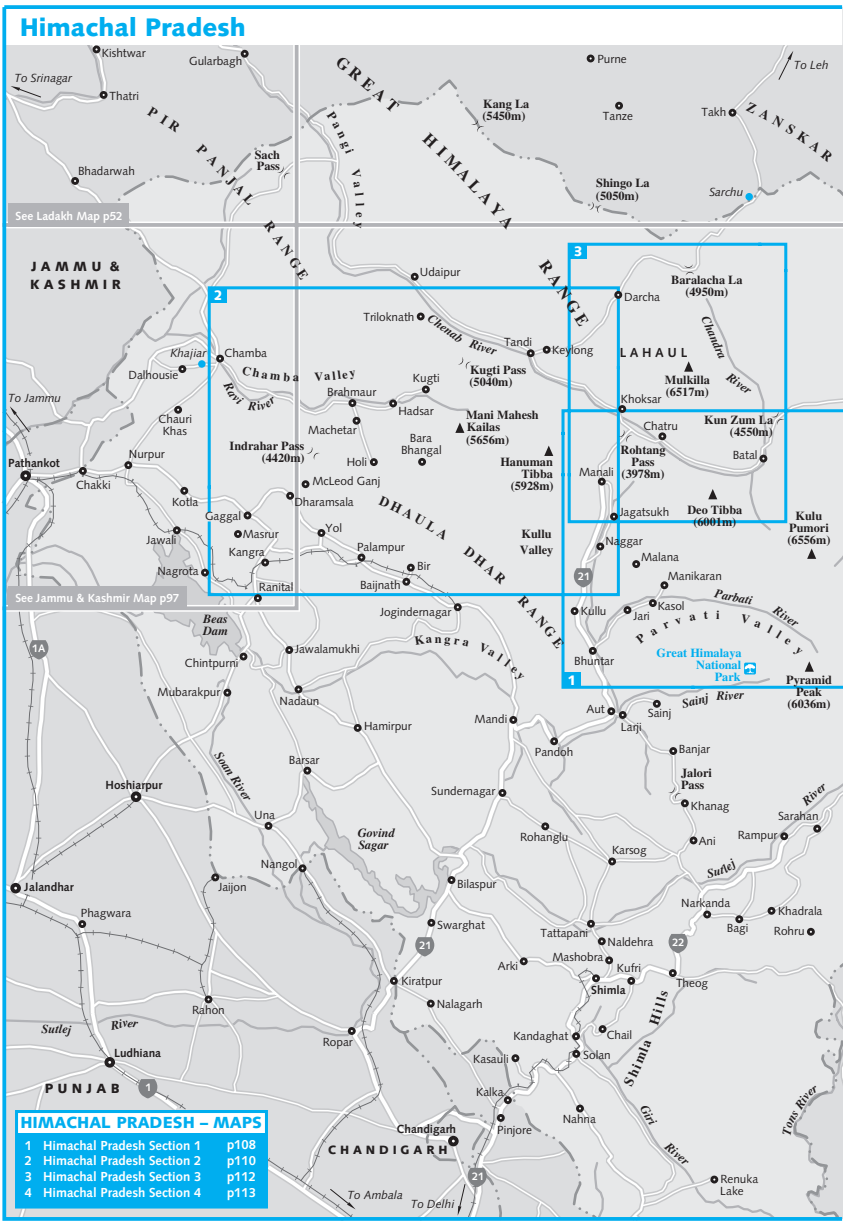
HIGHLIGHTS

- Trek in the magnificent conifer and oak forests of the **Kullu Valley** (p104)
- Savour the panoramic views from alpine campsites high above Dharamsala witnessing the migration of the **Gaddi shepherds** (p120)
- Cross the **Pin Parvati Pass** (p126) and marvel at the huge peaks and glaciers that characterise the Great Himalaya Divide
- View the snow-capped peaks of the Dhaula Dhar and the Great Himalaya Range while crossing the **Kugti Pass** (p135)
- Trek from the verdant **Parvati Valley** (p124) to the stark landscape of Spiti

The Himalayan ranges of Himachal Pradesh are ripe for trekking. Possibilities abound to explore the remoter valleys of the Dhaula Dhar and the Pir Panjal through Hindu villages before ascending oak and conifer forests to alpine meadows set beneath impressive snow-capped peaks. Appreciate the flowered meadows that burst into bloom along the watercourses. Share a camp with the Gaddi shepherds who migrate over the high passes to grazing areas on the borderlands of Himachal and Ladakh.

From Manali there is a great range of treks out of the Kullu Valley, including a short foray to the ancient community of Malana, an extended itinerary from Jagatsukh to the Hampta Valley to Lahaul or a traverse of the Himalaya to the trans-Himalayan region of Spiti. Then there are the delightful treks out of McLeod Ganj to explore the foothills of the Dhaula Dhar. By contrast, follow Hindu devotees as they ascend the pilgrim trail to Mani Mahash Kailas in the remote Ravi Valley.

The main languages of Himachal Pradesh are Hindi, Pahari and Punjabi.


Himachal Pradesh
Kishtwar
Gularbagh
To Srinagar
Thatri
PIR PANJAL RANGE
Sach Pass
Bhadarwah
See Ladakh Map p52
GREAT HIMALAYA RANGE
Pangi Valley
Purne
To Leh
Kang La (5450m)
Tanze
Takh
ZANSKAR RANGE
Shingo La (5050m)
Sarchu
JAMMU & KASHMIR
Udaipur
Triloknath
Chenab River
Tandi
Keylong
Darcha
Baralacha La (4950m)
LAHAUL
Chandra River
Mulkilla (6517m)
Khoksar
Kun Zum La (4550m)
Chatru
Rohtang Pass (3978m)
Batal
Manali
Jagatsukh
Deo Tibba (6001m)
Kulu Pumori (6556m)
Naggar
Malana
Manikaran
Parbati River
Parvati Valley
Kasol
Jari
Kullu
Great Himalaya National Park
Pyramid Peak (6036m)
Bhuntar
Aut
Sainj
Sainj River
Larji
Banjar
Jalori Pass
Khanag
Sarahan
River
Rampur
Ani
Karsog
Sutlej
Rohanglu
Pandoh
Mandi
Hamirpur
Sundernagar
Barsar
Suan River
Una
Govind Sagar
Nangol
Jaijon
Bilaspur
Hoshiarpur
Jalandhar
Phagwara
Swarghat
Tattapani
Naldehra
Narkanda
Khadrala
Bagi
Rohru
Mashobra
Arki
Kufri
Shimla
Theog
Shimla Hills
Kiratpur
Nalagarh
Rahon
Sutlej River
Ropar
Ludhiana
Kandaghat
Chail
Solan
Kasauli
Kalka
Nahna
Giri River
Toss River
Renuka Lake
PUNJAB
Chandigarh
Pinjore
CHANDIGARH
To Ambala
To Delhi
Khajiar
Chamba
Dalhousie
Chamba Valley
Ravi River
Kugti
Kugti Pass (5040m)
Brahmaur
Hadsar
Machetar
Mani Mahesh Kailas (5656m)
Bara Bhangal
Indrahar Pass (4420m)
Holi
Hanuman Tibba (5928m)
McLeod Ganj
Dharamsala
DHAULA DHAR RANGE
Kullu Valley
To Jammu
Chauri Khas
Pathankot
Chakki
Nurpur
Kotla
Gaggal
Masrur
Yol
Jawali
Kangra
Palampur
Bir
Baijnath
Nagrota
Ranital
See Jammu & Kashmir Map p97
Beas Dam
Jogindernagar
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HIMACHAL PRADESH – MAPS
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HISTORY

Himachal Pradesh (HP) is one of the youngest states in India. It is a composite of many hill kingdoms (including Kullu, Lahaul, Spiti, Chamba, Kangra and Kinnaur) that maintained a long history of independence until the mid-19th century. Following the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, these kingdoms were formally annexed to British India and administered as part of the Punjab. In 1966 the Punjab was partitioned into the states of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh became an independent state in 1970 and was given formal recognition as a state within the Indian Union in 1971. It is administered out of Shimla.

ENVIRONMENT

Himachal Pradesh is characterised by a complex series of mountain ranges. The lowest is the Dhaula Dhar, which rises to an average elevation of 4500m to 5000m. To its north are the snow-capped ridges of the Pir Panjal, followed by the Great Himalaya Range, which separates Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh. Many of its peaks rise above 6000m, while the glaciated passes are above 5000m. Beyond this, the Zanskar Range forms the mountain divide between the Spiti Valley and the Tibetan Plateau.

Himachal is also drained by three of the main tributaries of the Indus. This includes the Sutlej that flows from Tibet before forging a course through the Zanskar, Himalaya and Dhaula Dhar ranges; the Chenab flows from close to Chandra Tal in Lahaul; while the source of the Ravi is from the flanks of sacred peak of Mani Mahesh Kalias.

Refer to the Flora & Fauna boxed text (p105) for an overview of the animals and birdlife that can be seen.

CLIMATE

The valleys of Chamba, Kangra and Kullu come under the influence of the Indian monsoon. Pre-monsoon clouds build up by mid-June and the first heavy rainfall normally occurs by early July. The heaviest rainfalls are in August, and continue until early September. Day temperatures vary considerably, rising to above 20°C, even at higher altitudes, and dropping below freezing during some of the worst storms, which deposit snow on the higher elevations.

The region of Lahaul experiences a modified monsoon climate, with most rain falling on the south side of the Pir Panjal Range. However, it is subject to the occasional monsoon storm in July and August.

Spiti lies outside the influence of the monsoon and is not subject to heavy rainfalls. The same holds for the Kinnaur region north of the Himalaya Range, although southern Kinnaur is subject to the monsoon rain in July and August.

The post-monsoon season (mid-September to late October) in Himachal is normally settled, with day temperatures between 15°C and 20°C. Towards late October, the first of the permanent winter snows fall on the passes.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trekking season extends from May until October, although November is also a pleasant time to undertake a shorter trek and visit the region's hill stations. The season coincides with the spring thaw, making it possible to traverse the lower passes across the Dhaula Dhar and the Pir Panjal from mid-May. The higher passes, including those over the Himalaya Range, are normally passable by mid-June. Monsoon rain in July and August is experienced in many of the regions south of the Pir Panjal, including the Kullu, Kangra and lower Ravi Valleys. The first winter snows do not normally fall until mid-October, although storms and huge snowfalls have been known in mid-September.

The Rohtang Pass (linking Manali to Lahaul and Leh) and the Kun Zum La (linking Lahaul and Spiti) are normally open in June. The highway linking Shimla to Kinnaur and Spiti is open for most of the year, although landslides can occasionally close the road.

Maps

The Leomann 1:200,000 series and the US Military U502 1:250,000 series are useful for both planning and trekking. See Planning for each trek for details of specific map requirements.

Books

Kulu: The End of the Habitable World by Penelope Chetwode describes a leisurely trek between Shimla and Manali in 1963; GD Kholsa's *Himalayan Circuit* details a trek from Manali to Lahaul in the 1950s well before the mountain trails were developed into roads. For background on the Kullu Valley refer to *At Home in the Himalayas* by Christina Noble; *Over the High Passes* also by Christina Noble describes the lifestyle of the Gaddi shepherds. For an overview of the possibilities in Spiti consult *Spiti: Adventures in the trans-Himalaya* by Harish Kapadia. Nineteenth-century tomes on Himachal include AFP Harcourt's *The Himalayan Districts of Kooloo, Lahaul and Spiti*.

Permits & Regulations

With the exception of the Kinnaur Kalias trek, there are no special regulations or permits for undertaking the treks in this chapter. However, an Inner Line permit is necessary if travelling between Spiti and Kinnaur. The permit can most easily be issued from the District Magistrate in Shimla or Rekong Peo (Kinnaur) or from the Sub-Divisional Magistrate in Kaza (Spiti). Do not worry that the permit does not mention trekking. The standard Inner Line permit is acceptable to the police and at checkpoints. All you need to do is show your passport and register your itinerary.

Officially you need a minimum group of four to travel, but this rule no longer seems to be enforced. You need a passport-sized photograph, a photocopy of your passport (including your personal details and the page with your Indian visa) and an application form from the Magistrate's office.

MANALI & THE KULLU VALLEY

The Kullu Valley is justifiably considered one of the most picturesque valleys in the West Himalaya. It is practically enclosed by snow-capped mountain ranges that give way to alpine meadows and conifer forests. At lower elevations, the apple orchards, cornfields and rice paddies merge with an assortment of villages and towns that stretch along the course of the Beas River.

For trekkers, a stay in Manali is a welcome interlude before heading off on the trail. The option of undertaking a short trek, without the need for complex logistics,

FLORA & FAUNA

The drier, higher elevations north of the Himalaya, including Lahaul, Spiti and eastern Kinnaur, attract wildlife similar to that of Ladakh and the Zanskar. *Bharal* graze on the high ridges, while **snow leopards** have been sighted in the high, remote valleys in Kinnaur and the Pin National Park in Spiti.

Ibex are found south of the Himalaya Range and on the high alpine pastures of the Pir Panjal, while **thar** are generally confined to the upper forest bands. Two members of the goat-antelope family – the **goral** and **serow** – are also found in this vicinity. Goral favour the grassy slopes, while serow tend to roam the higher cliffs. **Musk deer** inhabit the dense thickets towards the upper levels of the tree line.

Brown bears are confined to the alpine pastures where they forage for small rodents and roots throughout the summer. In late autumn, before hibernation, they are often seen in birch copses close to alpine meadows. **Black bear** are often found in the oak and conifer forests, along with **forest leopards**, which stalk close to villages in search of stray domestic animals. **Marmots** are common in the mountain valleys, while troops of **langur** are often seen in the oak forests above the Kullu Valley and Dharamsala.

The **golden eagle**, **kestrel**, **lammergeier** and **Himalayan griffon** ascend to above 5000m in search of prey. There are also a variety of **pheasants**. Six of the seven pheasants in the West Himalaya can be found in the Great Himalaya National Park to the east of the Kullu Valley. The high-altitude meadows close to the Himalaya are also the habitat of the **brown and robin accentors** and **black-billed magpies**. The forests provide a habitat for a variety of **woodpeckers**, **jays**, **rosefinches**, **Himalayan bulbuls**, **white-throated laughing thrush** and the distinctive **white-capped water redstart**.

If you are spending a few days in hill resorts such as Manali and Dharamsala, you may spot **Indian and drongo cuckoos**, **scarlet minivets**, **white-browed fantails**, **rock thrush**, **Hume's warblers** and **yellow-breasted greenfinches**.

The temperate forests of Himachal extend above the cultivated rice and cornfields to stands of **oak**, **chestnut** and **maple**. The **deodar** and **blue pine** are also present at elevations between 1800m and 3000m before giving way to **mixed oak** and **West Himalayan spruce**, **fir** and **rhododendron**, where a variety of **mosses**, **ferns** and **orchids** can also be appreciated. A small band of **silver birch** defines the upper limit of the treeline. An ideal trek to appreciate the relationship between elevation and forest bands is to ascend the forest bands to the alpine meadows of the Hampta Valley.

The best time to appreciate wildflowers is July and August. A trek to the alpine slopes below the Chandrakani Pass, to the meadows above Kareri Lake, or close to the Kugti Pass provide an exceptional array of species, including **aster**, **gentians**, **primula**, **euphorbia**, **delphinium**, **anemone**, **potentilla** and **saxifrage**.

The region of Lahaul is an attractive alternative when other areas are subject to the monsoon. A trek to the alpine meadows of the Miyar Valley in July and August is particularly rewarding, while the meadows in the vicinity of Chandra Tal display a variety of flowering plants. To the north of the Himalayan Range, there is less to see. Like in Ladakh, the best flowering areas are close to the irrigation channels or along the banks of streams in the remote valleys.

is one reason why this is the most popular trekking-off point in Himachal Pradesh. For the more ambitious, there are challenging forays to Spiti as well as to Lahaul, Zanskar and Ladakh.

HISTORY

The history of the Kullu Valley can be traced back to the 10th century when its capital was established at Jagatsukh. The local rajah ruled the upper part of the valley between Sultanpur (Kullu) and the Rohtang Pass. It was not until the 15th century that the boundaries of the kingdom extended south to Mandi. During the Moghul period the Kullu rajahs paid tribute to the emperor's court before a turbulent era when the Sikhs changed the balance of power in the West Himalaya. The Sikh armies invaded the Kullu Valley in 1840–41, and the conflict

was not resolved until after the Sikh wars with the British and the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846. After the treaty, most of the hill states, including Kullu, were administered by the British.

In the latter half of the 19th century, many roads and forest trails in the Kullu Valley were upgraded. Forest areas were explored, and the Public Works Department and Forest Department moved into the mountain regions. The system of beggar (forced) labour enabled the improvement of trails and living conditions in the more remote villages.

It was a time when many British families settled in the valley. Orchards were established and comfortable houses constructed in the local style. The first drivable road into the valley, up the Larji Gorge, was completed in 1927. For many settlers, this was the beginning of the end of their tranquil life in the valley, and many families were on their way home to Britain well before 1947.

ENVIRONMENT

Dominating the region's topography are the Dhaula Dhar, Pir Panjal and Great Himalaya ranges. The Great Himalaya National Park is east of the Kullu Valley and includes the upper sections of the Parvati Valley. The Manali Sanctuary extends to the upper elevations of the Bara Bhangal and the Pir Panjal ranges.

The best chance of viewing wildlife is in the national parks and sanctuaries. The ibex and markhor tend to seek out the highest crags above the alpine meadows, while serow, goral and musk deer are found in the more secluded forest slopes above the Kullu Valley. Brown bears are seen in the birch copses, while black bears and forest leopards are found in the oak and conifer forests not far from the villages.

Treks out of the Kullu Valley provide fine opportunities to appreciate wildflowers. These include the meadows in the vicinity of the Chandrakani Pass, the Kali Hind Pass and the alpine reaches of the Hampta Valley.

ACCESS TOWN

Manali (p139) is the place to start. For most trekkers a few days in Manali, the thriving tourist town in the upper Kullu Valley provides an opportunity to relax after the journey from Delhi (p45) as well as making trek preparations.

JAGATSUKH TO HAMPTA PASS & LAHAUL

Duration 6 days
Distance 67km
Difficulty moderate
Start Jakatsukh
Finish Chatru
Nearest Town Manali
Transport bus/taxi
Summary Despite its proximity to Manali this is a relatively remote trek exploring the forests and meadows en route to the verdant Hampta Valley before traversing the Pir Panjal to Lahaul.

An attractive itinerary that avoids the dam construction in the lower Hampta Valley. From Jagatsukh the trek ascends less-frequented trails with unrivalled views of the peaks that enclose the upper Kullu Valley. The trek to the Hampta Valley includes adequate time to acclimatise before traversing Hampta Pass and savouring dramatic views of Deo Tibba (6001m) and Indrasan (6221m).

The trek also provides an excellent opportunity to acclimatise and improve fitness before trekking over the Shingo La or continuing up the Chandra Valley to complete the trek to Chandra Tal and the Baralacha La.

There is no accommodation between Jakatsukh and Chatru so be prepared to camp.

PLANNING

When to Trek

While it is possible to cross the Hampta Pass in June, there is normally snow on the pass until mid-July. In July, the region is subject to monsoon rain, although the heaviest rains fall in August. By September the weather clears and is ideal for trekking until late October.

What to Bring

A tent, stove and cooking gear are essential, plus food for at least four days. An ice axe is useful for descending the Hampta Pass early in the season.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 5 Kullu Valley, Parbati Valley & Central Lahaul*. Also refer to the US Military U502 series 1:250,000, *NI 43-16 ref Palampur*.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

From Manali (p139), catch the bus to Jagatsukh (Rs 10, one hour). A taxi will cost Rs 100 to Rs 150.

From Chatru, the bus from Spiti arrives around midday, continuing to Manali (Rs 100, 5½ hours). If heading to Darcha or Leh, catch the same bus to the junction of the Manali to Leh road (just above the village of Khoksar), from where there are buses to Keylong.

THE TREK (see map p108)

Day 1: Jagatsukh to Sauroto

4 hours, 12km

Time should be reserved to visit some of the ancient temples of Jagatsukh before ascending trails through conifer forest that afford a bird's-eye view of the upper Kullu Valley including the peak of Hanuman Tibba (5928m). The view also extends across to the road and pipeline built to service the dam above Sythen village that once marked the regular trekking route to the lower reaches of the Hampta Valley.

The origins of **Jagatsukh** date back to the 9th century and the foundations of the ancient Sandya Devi temple that was later rebuilt in the 15th century. After exploring Jagatsukh follow the trail immediately above the main market (1950m) that leads up to the village of **Boidara** (2150m). Continue through conifer forest to a small temple (2260m). The trail then winds gradually up through the forest to a number of Gujar encampments. Although this is only a two-hour trek from Jagatsukh there are some good campsites in the vicinity if there are any concerns regarding acclimatisation.

Beyond the Gujar encampments there is an ascent up a grassy ridge – steep in places – to reach the upper level of the conifer forest. The trail then winds around the contours to a substantial Gujar settlement known as **Sauroto** (3040m).

Day 2: Sauroto to Second Camp

3½–4 hours, 9km

A further stage to appreciate the high peaks of the upper Kullu Valley while following trails leading across lush alpine meadows set beneath the snow-capped ridges that form the Pir Panjal.

From camp, the trail traverses an open meadow before a short, steep, 200m ascent that leads high above a side river flowing on down to **Prini** village in the **Kullu Valley**. En route there are a variety of wildflowers including red poppies, wild roses and dwarf rhododendron that bloom late May/early June. To reach the river crossing involves a short, somewhat slippery descent through thick undergrowth. On the far side of the valley there is an equally steep ascent before following a trail that leads through holy oak forest to a clearing with more Gujar encampments and on to another fine campsite (2900m).

Note that this area is also referred to locally as Sauroto – namely a large upland region where the Gujar graze their buffalo in the summer.

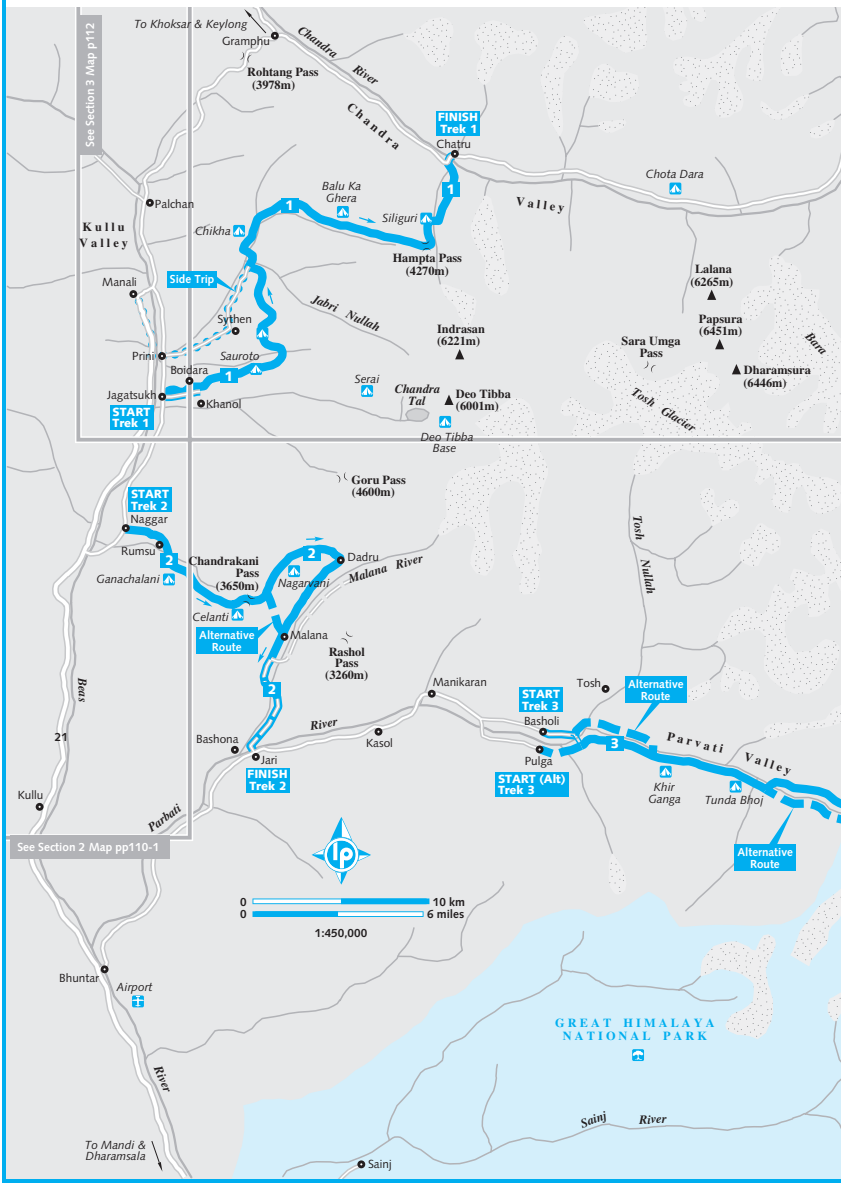
Day 3: Second Camp to Chikha

4 hours, 12km

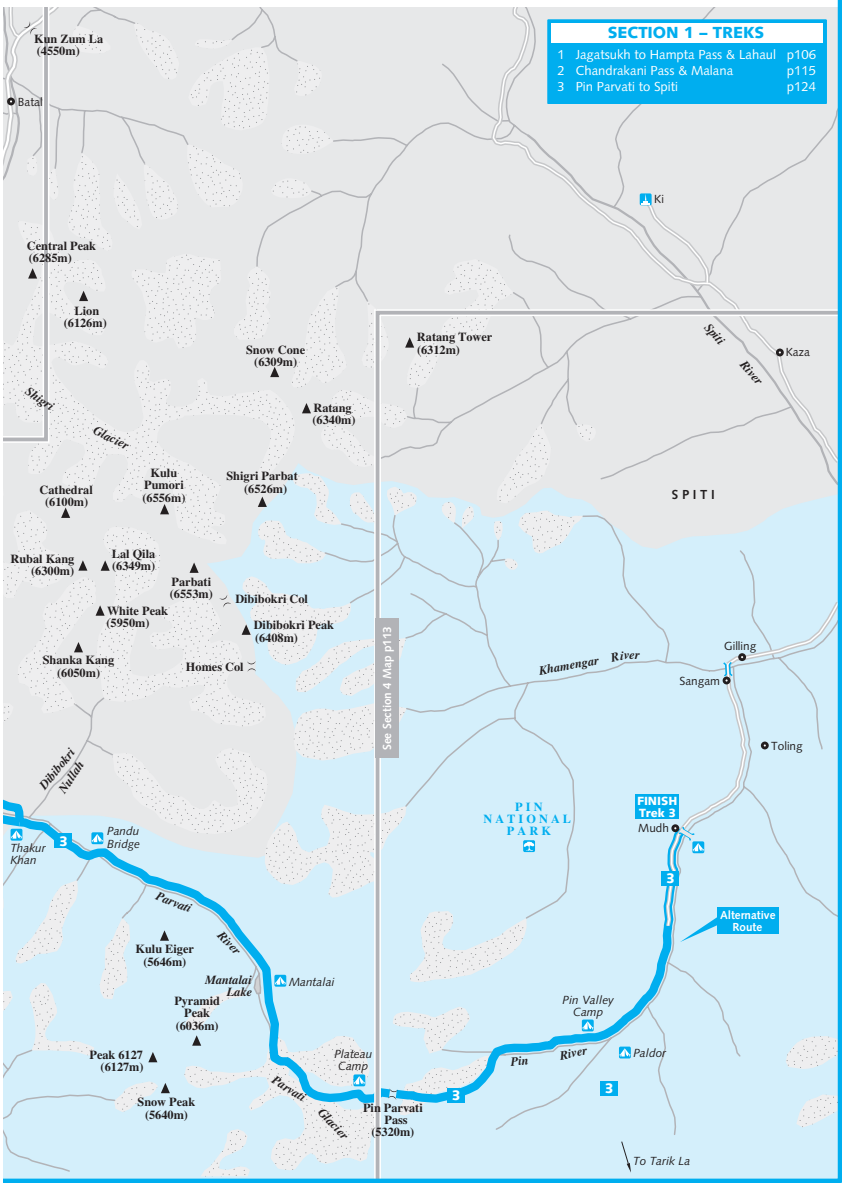
Shortly after leaving camp, the magnitude of the dam construction in the lower Hampta Valley is evident. This is reason indeed to reflect on the benefits of trekking from Jagatsukh before joining the regular trail up the Hampta Valley ascending to the delightful meadow at Chikha.

From camp the trail winds high above the Hampta Gorge and the village of **Sythen**. A large skiing development is proposed for this area although to date the plans are still at the drawing-board stage. The site of the dam can be seen after about 1½ hours as well as the forests and meadows in the vicinity of Chikha. There is no necessity to descend to the dam site. Simply follow the grazing tracks that wind around to the **Jabri Nullah** (2850m), which is about the half-way point on this stage. The trail continues on the true left of the Hampta River for 2km. Here there should be a wooden bridge in place (a snow bridge earlier in the season). If not then head on up the valley for a further 1km to where the river widens, and select a suitable spot to ford the river. This should not be an issue in the morning, but may present a few problems when the river level rises later in the day. Once across the river the trail ascends gradually

Himachal Pradesh Section 1



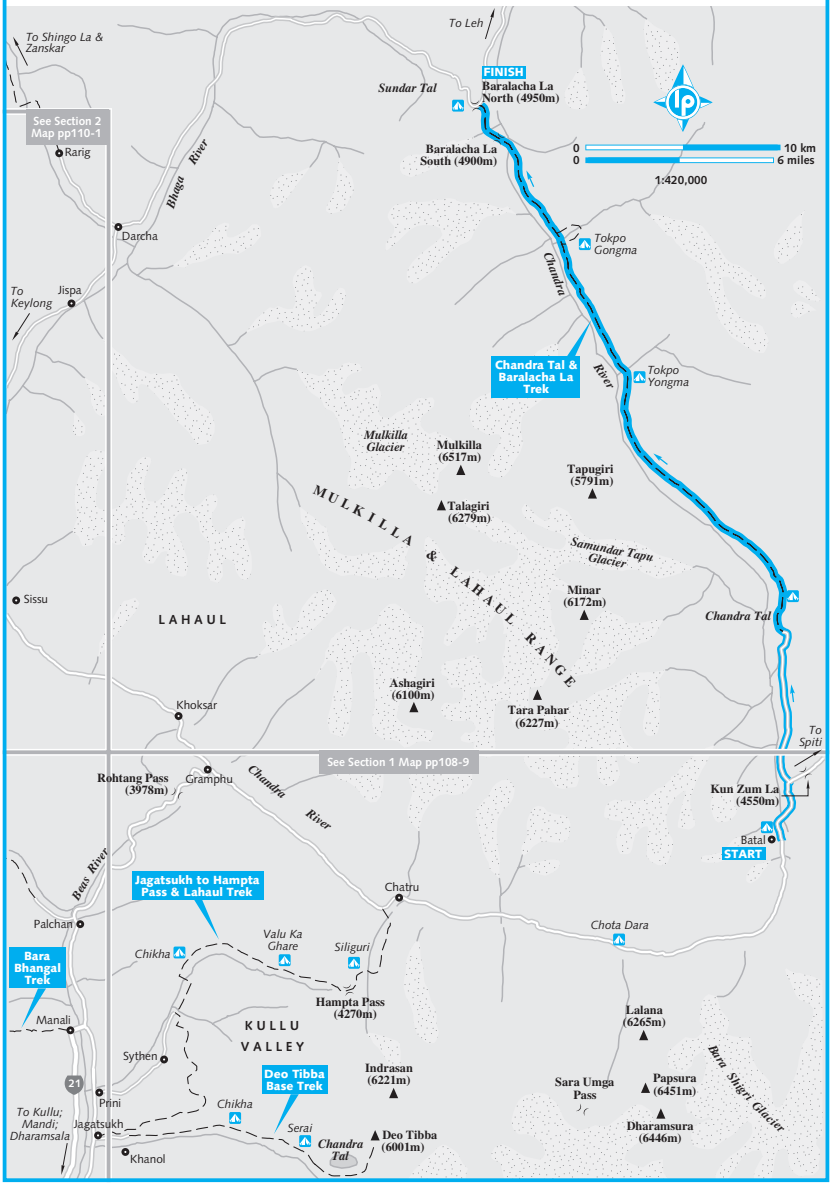
Himachal Pradesh Section 1

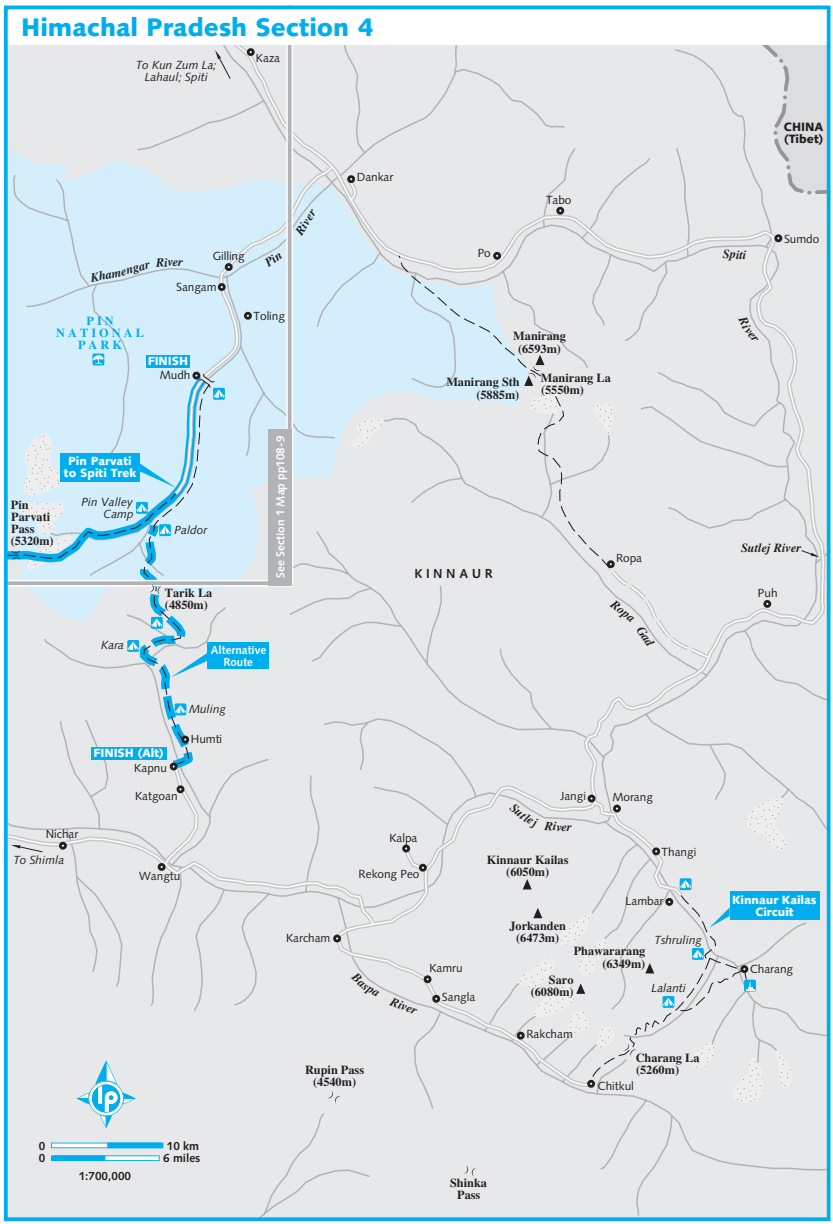


Himachal Pradesh Section 2

Himachal Pradesh Section 2

Himachal Pradesh Section 3




Himachal Pradesh Section 4
To Kun Zum La; Lahaul; Spiti
Kaza
Dankar
Pin River
Khamengar River
Gilling
Sangam
Toling
PIN NATIONAL PARK
FINISH
Mudh
Pin Parvati to Spiti Trek
Pin Valley Camp
Paldor
Pin Parvati Pass (5320m)
See Section 1 Map pp108-9
Tarik La (4850m)
Kara
Alternative Route
Muling
Humti
FINISH (Alt)
Kapnu
Katgoan
Nichar
To Shimla
Wangtu
Kalpa
Rekong Peo
Karcham
Kamru
Sangla
Baspa River
Rupin Pass (4540m)
Shinka Pass
Rakcham
Chitkul
Charang La (5260m)
Lalanti
Tshruling
Charang
Phawararang (6349m)
Saro (6080m)
Jorkanden (6473m)
Kinnaur Kailas (6050m)
Kinnaur Kailas Circuit
Lambar
Thangi
Jangi
Morang
Sutlej River
Ropa
Ropa Gad
Puh
Sutlej River
KINNAUR
Manirang (6593m)
Manirang Sth (5885m)
Manirang La (5550m)
Po
Tabo
CHINA (Tibet)
Spiti River
Sumdo
0 10 km
0 6 miles
1:700,000

to **Chikha** (3000m). The campsite is located alongside a side stream, while silver birch on the nearby ridges mark the upper limit of the treeline.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: MANALI TO CHIKHA VIA PRINI VILLAGE & SYTHEN

3 hours

From Manali hire a taxi that goes via **Prini** village (the original trekking-off point before the dam construction) and the village of **Sythen** to the dam wall. It is a 20-minute hike to the **Jabri Nullah** and from there follow Day 3 to Chikha. Allow three hours. However, factor in a day for acclimatisation before heading over the Hampta Pass.

Day 4: Chikha to Balu Ka Ghera

3 hours, 9km

A short stage to the base of the Hampta Pass. The trail is particularly attractive in July and August – the best time to appreciate the range of wildflowers including the delicate Himalayan blue poppy. Once at Balu Ka Ghera, the formidable peaks at the head of the Hampta Valley provide a tantalising glimpse of what to expect when crossing the Hampta Pass the next day.

Cross the side stream immediately above Chikha. This may entail getting the boots wet as the boulders over the stream can be slippery. The trail then enters a narrow gorge and ascends about 300m beneath impressive rock faces that drop sheer from the higher mountain ridges. It takes around an hour to climb out of the gorge to a vantage point where views extend back down the forested slopes of the Hampta Valley. Beyond the gorge the trail winds through flowered meadows that lead around to **Balu Ka Ghera** (3540m). Early in the season the campsite is often occupied by Gaddi shepherds waiting for the snow to melt before continuing on their seasonal migration to the high pastures of Lahaul.

Day 5: Balu Ka Ghera to Siliguri via Hampta Pass

5–6 hours, 15km

A traverse of the Hampta Pass will exceed expectations. The immediacy of the hanging glaciers and high peaks that enclose the upper valley together with spectacular views of Indrasan leave little doubt that the climb to the pass was worth it. To the north the Mulkilla and Lahaul Ranges never fail to impress.

From Balu Ka Ghera ascend the scree slopes to the true right of the valley. The trail through boulders is clearly defined by rock cairns. After an hour the trail reaches a broad alluvial plain (3690m) with views back down and across to Hanuman Tibba (5928m) on the far side of the Kullu Valley.

Cross the rivulet to reach the true left (south) side of the valley and continue across scree to a grassy meadow (3900m) that defines the base of the Hampta Pass. The meadow is in a magnificent setting surrounded by high peaks and rock cliffs and could figure as an alternative campsite to Balu Ka Ghera.

The trail heads up a gully to the right of the valley – again watch out for rock cairns – before winding up and around to the eastern entrance to the pass. From camp to the pass allow 3½ to four hours.

The **Hampta Pass** (4270 m) is a 0.5km slot in the mountains with commanding views of **Indrasan** (6221m), as well as the peak of **Deo Tibba** (6001m). To the north are the peaks forming the main Himalaya Range that rise above the stark landscape of **Lahaul**.

Immediately below the pass, the trail descends steeply at first, and early in the season care should be taken, as the upper slopes will be under snow and a thin sheet of ice. An ice axe would be a useful asset. After about 1km the gradient eases and continues down a series of switchbacks to the large meadow at **Siliguri** (3750m). The descent from the pass takes around 1½ to two hours.

Day 6: Siliguri to Chatru

2½–3 hours, 10km

The descent to Chatru takes in the upper Chandra Valley and the windswept landscape of Lahaul. From Chatru there is time that day to either drive back to Manali, or drive to Batal and continue on the trek to Chandra Tal or head through Lahaul and prepare for a trek to Zanskar.

Fording the icy stream flowing from the Indrasan Glacier provides an exhilarating start to the day. Don't be tempted to follow the alternative trail on the true left or east

DAM DEVELOPMENTS IN HIMACHAL

Dams for hydroelectricity nowadays form a familiar imprint on the mountain landscape in Himachal Pradesh. They have also played havoc with trekking itineraries! Since the last edition, the trek over the Chandrakani Pass to Malana has been modified to accommodate the new developments that now extend up the Malana Valley as far as Dadru. Likewise the trek to the base of Deo Tibba has been altered as the road to the dam site extends up the Jagatsukh Valley. The classic trek up the Hampta Valley to Lahaul has also changed with the development of a dam above Sythen village. The trek from Jagatsukh however provides an attractive alternative.

While the need to supply electricity to many of the towns in northern India is recognised, this has to be balanced with their impact on the Himalayan environment. There is often a significant gap between the environmental guidelines set by the state government and the ground reality. Reforestation programs are rarely adhered to while the structural remains of the dam site in the upper Parvati Valley are still evident many years after the site was abandoned.

side of the valley. This is only for the Gaddi who are more sure-footed than the average mountain goat.

The trail down the true right of the valley leads through scree and boulder fields down to a grassy knoll from where there are views of the road leading up the Chandra Valley to Batal and the Kun Zun La to Spiti. A further steep descent leads to a bridge over the Indrasan River before continuing for 1km on the true left bank of the **Chandra River** to the road bridge and Chatru.

Chatru (3360m) is just a line of *dhabas* along the road, on the north side of the Chandra River.

CHANDRAKANI PASS & MALANA

Duration 5 days
Distance 67km
Difficulty easy
Start Naggar
Finish Jari
Nearest Town Manali
Transport bus/taxi
Summary A bird's-eye view of the Kullu Valley and the snow-capped Pir Panjal Range en route to the ancient village of Malana.

The villagers from the Kullu Valley trek to Malana in a day. This is not surprising as they probably take for granted the panoramic views that extend up the Kullu Valley to the snow-capped peaks of the Pir Panjal or the myriad peaks north of the Malana and Parbati Valleys that define the crest of the Himalaya.

We recommend a more leisurely pace with time to acclimatise and take in the views from the magnificent camp below the Chandrakani Pass. Beyond the pass we further recommend the route leading to Nagarvani for great views of the upper Malana Valley.

The construction of the dam several kilometres below Malana earlier this decade as well as the construction just above the village will change the character of the valley. The trek stages have been varied accordingly.

The trek can be completed without a tent if heading directly from the Chandrakani Pass to Malana village.

PLANNING

When to Trek

Villagers from Malana normally cross the Chandrakani Pass from April until November. However, the regular trekking season extends from May through October. Monsoon rains come in July and August.

What to Bring

To fully appreciate the best campsites and retain flexibility, bring your own tent, stove and cooking gear, plus food for at least two days.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 5 Kullu Valley, Parbati Valley & Central Lahaul*. Also refer to the US Military U502 series 1:250,000, *NI 43-16 ref Palampur*.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

From Manali, several buses run daily to Naggar (Rs 15, two hours). A taxi will cost around Rs 550.

From Jari, there are buses to Bhuntar (Rs 20, two hours). You may be able to get a seat on one of the direct private buses from Manikaran to Manali, which stop in Jari (Rs 200, six hours). The taxis at the stand at Jari charges Rs 500 to Bhuntar and Rs 1500 to Manali. Alternatively, four or five daily buses go to Kullu, from where there are onward buses to Manali.

THE TREK (see map p108)

Day 1: Naggar to Ganachalani via Rumsu

5 hours, 15km

Allow time to explore Naggar and its 500-year-old castle steeped in legend in its commanding position above the Kullu Valley. Naggar (1760m) is one of the former capitals of the Kullu Valley with its ancient 500-year-old Naggar Castle and the sandstone temple of Gauri Shankar that dates from the 11th century. There is also the **Roerich Gallery** (www.roerichtrust.org; admission Rs 30; 10am-6pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar), displaying the work of famous painter and philosopher Nicholas Roerich. His reputation as one of the avant-garde, post-1917 Russian painters was enhanced during his stay in the Kullu Valley in the 1930s, when he made Naggar his home. The first day's ascent also passes through the ancient village of Rumsu before a gradual ascent through mixed forest to the glade at Ganachalani.

At Naggar, hotels include the **Alliance Guest House** (☎ 247763; d Rs 200-400); **Hotel Ragini** (☎ 248185; Rs 600-1000); and **HPTDC Castle Hotel** (☎ 248316; dm/r from Rs 75/300, deluxe Rs 2000) comes complete with a resident ghost.

From Naggar, the trail leads past Roerich's cottage and along the main bridle path for 1km, before branching uphill to the village of **Rumsu** (2060m). There is a 4WD road to Rumsu but follow the foot trail and you can avoid the road for most of the 10km to the village.

Of particular interest in Rumsu is an impressive wooden temple with close ties to the temples dedicated to Jamlu in Malana. Leather boots or apparel are not permitted in the vicinity of the temple. In the main square there are outlets selling shawls and rugs that are woven by the villages in the winter.

Above Rumsu follow a well-defined trail through a forest of deodar, pine and horse chestnut. There is a small **campsite** and stream after 3km; from here it is a further 2km to the meadow at **Ganachalani** (2700m).

At Ganachalani, there are a couple of *dhabas* that provide meals and overnight shelter. There are also several *dhabas* and basic lodges on the meadows below the Chandrakani Pass.

Day 2: Ganachalani to Celanti

4 hours, 9km

The open meadows en route to the Chandrakani Pass are carpeted with wildflowers that are at their best in July and August. This is also the time when Gujar shepherds with their herds of buffalo establish their encampments close to the pass. On the ascent, savour views across to the formidable peaks and glaciers that form the Bara Bhangal Range. A rest day at the camp below the **Chandrakani Pass** is highly recommended.

Beyond Ganachalani the trail ascends through the forest for a further 4km to a series of open meadows. The lowest meadow is around 3000m, where shepherds from the Kullu Valley graze their animals. The trail then winds up through a small rhododendron forest and stands of silver birch to a series of alpine meadows. There are campsites including those in the vicinity of **Celanti** (3500m), although by far the best campsites are closer to the **Chandrakani Pass**.

Day 3: Celanti to Nagarvani via Chandrakani Pass

3 hours, 9km

A short stage with time to take in the magnificent views of the upper Malana Valley, the Ghalpo peaks in Lahaul as well as the snow-capped Himalaya Range rising above the Parvati Valley.

From the Celanti, it is less than an hour to the ridgeline and the cairns that define the **Chandrakani Pass** (3650m) with magnificent views of the main Himalaya Range as well as vistas to the south that stretch across the endless forested ridges to the Shimla Hills.

The Chandrakani Pass extends north for 1km along the ridgeline before the trail winds along the east face of the ridge for 2km to a prominent rock cairn. The trail then splits. The lower trail (alternative route) heads steeply down the hillside and continues directly to **Malana** village.

The higher trail to Nagarvani continues just below the crest of the ridge for a further 2km. It then descends through a series of rock gullies, small alpine meadows and birch groves (with an occasional brown-bear sighting) to a series of open meadows at **Nagarvani** (3350m). There is no shortage of campsites from where there are magnificent views across the forests and meadows to the peaks that enclose the upper Malana Valley. Time from the pass is around two to 2½ hours.

Day 4: Nagarvani to Malana

4–5 hours, 14km

After the serene camp at Nagarvani, the dam construction in the vicinity of Dadru may come as something of a shock to the system. These developments will change the landscape of the valley as well as the character of the once-isolated community of Malana.

While all the forest trails at one stage or another head to Dadru, some are easier to follow than others. Below Nagarvani keep an eye out for the main trail as it winds north across two intermediary ridges before descending – steeply in places – through oak and conifer forest to the outskirts of Dadru village.

Dadru (3000m) is the summer settlement for the Malana villagers. The village fields include barley and potatoes and an abundant cash crop of hemp. A road now extends on the far side of the valley to the site of the dam just below the settlement. Options to camp at Dadru are therefore limited.

In order to avoid the construction site, follow one of the higher trails above Dadru before descending to the established trail just above the course of the **Malana River**. The trail continues on the true left (west side of the valley) leading around the contours before a long and gradual ascent to Malana village. About 1km before the village, the trail joins the higher, direct trail from the Chandrakani Pass. If following this route, the trek from Celanti to Malana can be easily completed in one day.

Malana (2650m) is an isolated village community with around 50 families. It has its own language, customs and laws, and is governed by village elders. It is said the village beliefs were determined by the god Jamlu, who was pre-Aryan and independent of the Hindu gods who ruled the Kullu Valley. The existence of Malana was recorded in Moghul times. Until recently the villagers resisted intrusion from the outside world, see the boxed text Malana Village below.

Campsites are at a premium; the best is close to the school, 1km beyond the village. Alternatively, you can avoid putting up a tent by staying at one of the lodges. Lodges include the Malana Lodge and Renuka Lodge, with rooms for Rs 200.

Day 5: Malana to Jari

4–5 hours, 20km

Just beyond Malana there is a bird's-eye view of the forested ridges of the Parvati Valley. This is tempered by dam construction in the middle foreground that was completed in 2002. The environmental cost still needs to be balanced with the need

MALANA VILLAGE

Malana is not the most hospitable village in the Himalaya, even though its laws are not as strictly enforced as they were a generation ago. You are no longer required to take off your leather boots to walk through the village but you must not wear leather apparel in the vicinity of the Jamlu temple. You should not touch any of the walls, particularly near the temple. You should also avoid touching any of the villagers as they still regard outsiders as unclean. Rules regarding photography have been relaxed, although check before taking any photographs of the villagers. Breaking these rules can still incur a fine (Rs 1000) and there is a sign to that effect on the temples.

Until a few generations ago, the local people married within their community. The men still tend to stay in Malana, but women sometimes marry into families in the Parvati or Kullu Valleys.

to supply hydroelectricity to the towns of northern India.

From Malana, the direct and very steep trail descends 500m to the valley floor while a longer trail for loaded mules winds more gradually down the true left side through outlying fields that are attended by the villagers from Malana.

At the valley floor, a fairly level walk leads through conifer and oak forest for 5km before reaching the dam wall on the **Malana River**. Cross the dam wall to the true left of the valley and continue along the road. The 12km trek to Jari can be completed in two to three hours, although a service vehicle may offer you a lift.

Jari (1520m) is just above the confluence of the Malana and Parvati Rivers, on the main road linking Manikaran and the Kullu Valley.

CHANDRA TAL & BARALACHA LA

Duration 4 days
Distance 48km
Difficulty moderate
Start Batal
Finish Baralacha La
Nearest Towns Keylong/Manali
Transport bus/taxi/truck
Summary A wilderness trek from Batal/Chandra Tal to the alpine pastures of the Baralacha La.

This trek is an ideal follow-on from the Jagatsukh to Hampta Pass & Lahaul Pass trek (see p106). If undertaking this as a stand-alone trek, ensure adequate time for acclimatisation. It is not recommended to drive directly from Manali to Chandra Tal at 4270m as there is the chance of acute altitude sickness.

On the trek there are spectacular views of the Mulkilla and main Himalaya ranges while following the trails of the Gaddi shepherds to their summer grazing pastures.

Do not, however, undertake this trek without a guide, as preparation and a length of rope are needed when crossing the Tokpo Yongma and Tokpo Gongma.

There are a number of *dhabas* at Batal. Between Batal and the trailhead at the Baralacha La there is no overnight shelter.

PLANNING

When to Trek

Heavy winter snows in Lahaul prevent trekking before mid-June/early July. However, the region is outside the main brunt of the monsoon rain, and the trek can be completed through July and August until mid-October.

What to Bring

Trekking parties must be self-sufficient, with a tent, stove, cooking gear and food. A length of rope for the river crossings is also essential.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 5 Kullu Valley, Parbati Valley & Central Lahaul*. Also refer to the US Military U502 series 1:250,000, *NI 43-16 ref Palampur*.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

From Manali, catch the daily bus to Spiti that takes around six hours to reach Batal. From Batal to Chandra Tal there is no public transport. To hire a taxi you will need to make prior arrangements in Manali.

The buses from Manali to Leh drive over the Baralacha La. However, it is unlikely that there will be spare seats. Hitching a ride on a truck is the best option apart from making arrangements prior to leaving Manali.

THE TREK (see map p112)

Day 1: Batal to Chandra Tal

6–7 hours, 15km

Once above Batal there are impressive views of the high Himalayan peaks including **Lalana** (6265m), **Papsura** (6451m) and **Dharamsura** (6446m) that tower above the **Bara Shigri Glacier** – one of the largest glaciers in the West Himalaya. The area is also of interest to geology students, as the Pir Panjal, the main Himalaya and the Baralacha Range merge in the vicinity of the nearby **Kun Zum La** (4550m).

Chandra Tal is also a highlight The dimensions of the lake never fail to impress – it is over 1km long and up to 500m wide in places – and is distinguished by its half-moon shape – hence Chandra Tal, the Moon Lake. The lake is also recognised as one of the main sources of the Chenab River – one of the five main tributaries of the Indus.

Batal (3950m) is essentially a cluster of **dhabas** at the base of the Kun Zun La and the road linking Manali and Lahaul to Spiti. There is a small, grassy campsite a short distance from the road.

From Batal, cross the road bridge over the **Chandra River** and head up the road towards the Kun Zum La. After 2km the dirt road diverts up the Chandra Valley. From here it is possible to take a short-cut and continue the gradual climb for two to 2½ hours, around 8km, to an extensive boulder field and the stream flowing from Chandra Tal. The trail then crosses a fertile, grassy plateau that divides the Chandra Valley and the side valley formed by the Chandra Tal stream.

On reaching the lake follow the Gaddi shepherd trail around the western bank to the campsite immediately to the north of the lake (see Chandra Tal boxed text, p120).

Chandra Tal (4270m) is the summer home to around a dozen Gaddi shepherd families who graze their flocks in the vicinity of the lake. The Gaddi have long held traditional grazing rights in the area and are justifiably suspicious of developments, now that the road extends to the lake. In view of this it is not uncommon to discover a small road bridge missing – necessitating that everyone, including tourists, driving in and out of Chandra Tal have to at least walk the last 1km or 2km to the lake.

Day 2: Chandra Tal to Tokpo Yongma

5 hours, 12km

There are fine views of the **Mulkilla Range** and the extensive **glacier** flowing from **Mulkilla** (6517m), the highest peak in the region. The upper sections of the trek are drier around Chandra Tal making for a starker landscape on the approach to the Tokpo Yongma.

Trek up the broad glacial valley beyond **Chandra Tal** and ascend a series of open meadows that gradually give way to extensive scree slopes. The occasional cluster of wildflowers along the banks of a side stream provide the only relief in an otherwise dune-coloured landscape. There are plenty of side gullies to cross before reaching a lone shepherd camp after about three hours. The trail then contours high above the **Chandra River** until it reaches the fast flowing **Tokpo Yongma**, the lower river, at 4420m. There are a number of small grassy campsites to choose from before crossing the river the following morning.

Day 3: Tokpo Yongma to Tokpo Gongma

3–4hours, 9km

After negotiating the Tokpo Yongma, the stark profile of the upper Chandra Valley becomes apparent, while the snow-capped peaks rising above the Baralacha La provide a glimpse of the spectacular mountain scenery on the final day of the trek.

In July and August the chocolate-coloured torrent of the **Tokpo Yongma** may seem formidable if arriving by mid-afternoon. However, by the following morning the water level drops dramatically. If unsure of a crossing point, look out for rock cairns or take advice from the Gaddi shepherds. Do not attempt to cross the river on your own. A length of rope, karabiner and harness are also useful to ensure a safe crossing.

Beyond the side river, the trail gradually ascends the broad valley. Watch out for rock cairns as the trail winds through boulder fields. After 7km or around 2½ to three hours, cross a side stream that should not present difficulties in the morning. The trail then ascends a series of scant meadows before reaching a second major side river, the **Tokpo Gongma**, the upper river, (4650m).

If you have made an exceptionally early start and reached the river by no later than 10am to 10.30am, then it is possible to cross the river. There is a comfortable campsite just beyond the Tokpo Gongma alongside a Gaddi shepherd encampment. If not, camp alongside the Tokpo Gongma and cross the river the following morning.

Day 4: Tokpo Gongma to Baralacha La

4 hours, 12km

After trekking in the confines of the upper Chandra Valley it is a relief to ascend the high meadows and gain uninterrupted views of the Baralacha Range while the snow-capped summits of the Himalaya Range provide an impressive backdrop to

CHANDRA TAL

It would be hard to imagine a more serene setting than that of Chandra Tal. The glacial lake has for generations attracted Gaddi shepherds who graze their huge flocks in the nearby pastures while views of the Himalaya Range to the south and the Mulkilla Range on the far side of the Chandra Valley enhance the setting. To help generate more tourists to the region a dirt road was constructed to the lake several years ago. Herein lies the problem, as there has been a substantial increase in the amount of garbage alongside the banks of the lake. A concerted effort is needed on the part of the state government and closer to hand by the tour operators from Manali to undertake a regular clean-up program to ensure that one of the most attractive environs of Himachal is kept in a pristine state.

the south of the valley. The meadows below the Baralacha La are particularly attractive, being carpeted with wildflowers from the time of the spring snow melt in late June until September.

Even in the early morning, a harness and rope may be useful when crossing the **Tokpo Gongma**. Again, seek the help of the Gaddi shepherds if the water level is high. From the riverbank, ascend a series of meadows where hundreds of sheep and goats graze until the end of August, when the Gaddi shepherds commence their return migration to the Kullu Valley.

Beyond the encampments the trail ascends to a substantial rock cairn that marks the entrance to the Baralacha La. The actual summit of the pass is 2km further up the valley. The trail leads across extensive shale fields that are under snow until the end of July, while on the opposite side of the valley is a huge tumbling glacier that flows from an unnamed peak between the Chandra and Bhaga Valleys.

The **Baralacha La** is a double pass. It marks the divide between the Chandra (to the east) and Bhaga rivers (to the west) that eventually form the Chenab River. It also marks the divide between the **Chandra/Bhaga** river catchment (flowing south) and a tributary of the **Tsarap River** that flows north into the Zanskar River and eventually into the Indus.

After crossing the undulating terrain of **Baralacha La South** (4900m) there is a further stream crossing before continuing across windswept meadows for a further 3km to 4km to **Baralacha La North** (4950m) on the Manali to Leh road. From here, there is a further option to continue north on the far side of the pass for 4km to the *dhabas* at Bharatpur, a convenient stop for the night before driving on to **Leh** the following day.

BARA BHANGAL

Duration 11 days
Distance 153km
Difficulty demanding
Start Manali
Finish Bir
Public Transport bus/shared taxi
Summary A remote trek traversing the Bara Bhangal Range and Dhaula Dhar. Visit the isolated settlement of Bara Bhangal and follow Gaddi shepherd trails to the Kangra Valley.

This trek covers one of the most remote corners of Himachal Pradesh. There are a number of demanding days, so an extra day or two should be set aside for acclimatisation before crossing the first pass. The Kali Hind and Thamsar Passes are both complicated routes; a local guide is necessary.

Apart from the occasional Gaddi shepherd encampment, there are no settlements until Bara Bhangal – a substantial village cut off by high passes and deep snow for at least six months of the year.

The alpine campsites are particularly attractive. Extra time camping will provide a fine opportunity to explore the snowfields and glaciers that define the Bara Bhangal and Dhaula Dhar Ranges.

Eventually the road being constructed up the Ravi Valley will reach the village of Bara Bhangal, and avoid the necessity of trekking over the Thamsar Pass to complete the trek.

There are Forest Rest Houses at Bara Bhangal, Rajgundha and Billing. Elsewhere,

vacant shepherds huts may be the only option. A tent is essential.

PLANNING

When to Trek

Heavy snow on the Kali Hind and Thamsar Passes precludes trekking until June. Even then, snow will remain on the passes until mid-July when the monsoon rains begin. Post-monsoon (mid-Sep to mid-Oct) is ideal for trekking.

What to Bring

Bring a tent, stove and cooking gear plus food for at least 10 days. Ice axes, harnesses and rope should also be carried, although neither of the passes is heavily crevassed.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 4 Chamba, Dhaula Dhar Passes, Pangi Valley & Western Lahaul*. Also refer to the US Military U502 series 1:250,000, NI *43-16 ref Palampur*.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

From Bir, there is a bus to Baijnath (Rs 10, three per day, one hour). From Baijnath (on the Mandi to Pathankot highway), regular buses go to Dharamsala, McLeod Ganj and the Kullu Valley.

From Palachak there is a daily bus service (Rs 25, two to three hours) to Mandi with connections either back to Manali or onto Dharamsala and McLeod Ganj.

THE TREK (see maps p108 & 111)

Day 1: Manali to Lama Dug

4–5 hours, 15km

A short, but relatively steep stage offering a bird's-eye view of Manali and the upper Kullu Valley. On the way up note the change in forest bands from deodar to oak to silver birch while ascending the Manali Sanctuary.

The trek commences at the entrance to the **Manali Sanctuary**. From Manali (2050m), follow the road to Duff Dunbar before veering off to a trail to the north that leads to the entrance. The trail ascends the deodar forest for 3km to a rocky outcrop with commanding views of Manali. Just above this vantage point is a small meadow (2350m) before a steep 400m ascent through small pastures and conifer and oak forest. This section is particularly difficult after rain and can often reduce the first day to a continual mudslide – all the way to the campsite at Lama Dug.

Lama Dug (2920m) is a delightful meadow ringed by maple, spruce and oak; there are stands of silver birch at higher elevations. The small stream flowing through the meadow is one of the sources of Manali's water supply.

Day 2: Lama Dug to Rieli

6–7 hours, 17km

The alpine ridge separating Lama Dug and Reili necessitates ascending to around 3800m. An intermediary stage or an additional night at Lama Dug is therefore recommended in order to acclimatise. Whatever the option, there is no end to the dramatic views. To the north are the peaks that form the Pir Panjal including the summit of Deo Tibba (6001m). If trekking in July or August the meadows will also be carpeted with a variety of wildflowers that flourish during the monsoon period.

Beyond Lama Dug, the trail ascends the meadow along the southern perimeter of the Manali Sanctuary from where there are uninterrupted views north to the Solang Valley and the Rhotang Pass. The ascent across the higher pastures is long and gradual following shepherd trails that regularly split and turn. The correct trail constantly ascends and does not veer towards the **Manali Pass** and the pastures to the north. If in doubt, check your directions at one of the many Gaddi encampments. It takes around four to five hours to reach the highest of the ridges, which form an alpine plateau at around 3800m.

From the alpine plateau, the trail heads south across a series of verdant ridges. A long descent follows, reaching an intermediate valley and a prominent side trail (from Katrain in the Kullu Valley). From this point, a gradual climb of 2km to 3km leads through a small oak forest to the meadow known locally as **Rieli** (3320m).

Day 3: Reili to Kali Hind Base Camp

5 hours, 11km

Constant views across the Kullu Valley towards the Chandrakani Pass and further west to the peaks that form the main Himalaya Range provide a memorable vista while ascending to the base of the Kali Hind Pass.

The trail winds above the upper river course before gradually descending to the valley floor. The location of the next camp can be appreciated, as can the route to the pass, on the crest of the Bara Bhangal Range. After about two hours, the trail crosses a bridge to the true right of the valley before ascending a series of grassy ridges to the base of the **Kali Hind Pass** (3700m).

Day 4: Base Camp to Lake Camp via Kali Hind Pass

4–5 hours, 10km

A challenging stage to the Kali Hind Pass and the crest of the Bara Bhangal Range. The nearby snowfields and hanging glaciers provide an exhilarating backdrop, while the peaks forming the main Himalaya Range to the east and the Mani Mahesh Range to the west afford an impressive panorama.

It takes around three to four hours to reach the pass so an early start is essential. The trail first ascends a series of grassy ridges to a small plateau (4000m). Then the hard work begins. The trail is often ill-defined as it heads up a number of scree slopes – steep in sections – to reach a broad snow plateau that marks the final approach to the pass. Another short ascent on snow and ice rivulets leads to the cairns and prayer flags of **Kali Hind Pass** (4610m).

The initial descent from the pass avoids a large crevasse before heading across a snowfield that gradually descends for an hour to a series of glacial lakes (4350m) and a rather rocky campsites. If the weather deteriorates there is the option to descend to a small campsite about two hours further down the valley.

Day 5: Lake Camp to Danku Thach

5–6 hours, 14km

There is a remarkable change of geography west of the Kali Hind Pass. It is evident that the Bara Bhangal Range acts as a barrier restricting the passage of monsoon rain from the southeast, while the area is also beyond the influence of the rain extending up the Ravi Valley. The result is an arid landscape more similar to Ladakh, a complete contrast to the verdant valleys leading up to the pass.

From the glacial lakes camp it is possible to identify the route leading down the true right (north) all the way down to the valley floor. The trail heads across a rocky plateau before descending steeply over scree and boulders down to a stream that forms one of the headwaters of the **Ravi River**. Once on the valley floor the trail continues down the true right of the valley to a potential **campsite** (3800m) – worth noting if extending the stage over the Kali Hind Pass.

The trail then continues along the river course through boulder and scree gullies. It crosses the river numerous times before reaching a Gaddi encampment and a small Hindu shrine at **Danku Thach** (3500m).

Day 6: Danku Thach to Damari Thach

6 hours, 15km

By now the influence of the monsoon rains penetrating up the Ravi Valley is reflected in the more verdant landscape. There are also fine views down the Ravi Gorge while to the south the mountain panorama extends to the snow-capped peaks that define the Dhaula Dhar.

Just beyond **Danku Thach**, cross the side river before continuing down the valley across flowered meadows and occasional scree slopes. The trail remains on the true right or north side of the valley past several Gaddi shepherd encampments. Birch trees (to 3600m) and blue pine (to 3300m) reflect the upper limit of the monsoon rain in this remote valley.

There is a short, steep ascent to reach a meadow with two huge ancient maple trees. Continue climbing to reach a side valley from the north and a further river crossing. Camp here or continue for 4km to a large meadow known as **Damari Thach** (3550m).

Day 7: Damari Thach to Bara Bhangal

5–6 hours, 15km

It's a 1000m descent to Bara Bhangal, one of the most isolated villages in Himachal Pradesh. It consists of 30 to 40 houses and is essentially a summer settlement for villagers from the upper Kangra Valley. Only a handful of the men remain there in the winter. A rest day in Bara Bhangal is recommended.

From **Damari Thach** the trail ascends a further alpine ridge that affords fine views down the Ravi Gorge before the long and gradual descent leads to Bara Bhangal. The

trail winds through stands of silver birch before descending through rhododendron and blue-pine forest. There are signs of brown bears having foraged in the grassy clearings while snakes may also be seen, which is quite remarkable at elevations above 3000m.

The final 500m descent is steep and dusty in places to the outlying cornfields of **Bara Bhangal** (2550m). A glance at the map might tempt the unwary to believe there is a more direct trail following the course of the **Ravi River**. While there is a trail of sorts, by the time it enters the gorge it is extremely difficult for all but the most sure-footed villager to follow. However, there are plans to extend the road from **Chamba** up the gorge to Bara Bhangal that will undoubtedly change the character of the village.

Day 8: Bara Bhangal to Thamsar

6–7 hours, 15km

The 1300m climb towards the base of the Thamsar Pass is not as steep as the contours suggest. However, once camp is established there is no doubt that you are back in the high mountains. The impressive views to the north include the peaks and glaciers of the Pir Panjal, while to the south are the high ridges and snowfields that form the Dhaula Dhar. A further rest day is recommended to explore the side valleys known only to a handful of Gaddi shepherds.

Leaving **Bara Bhangal** cross the bridge over the river flowing from the Kali Hind Pass and commence a steep 400m ascent of the valley leading to the south. Continue on the true left for 3km to a broad glacial valley before crossing to the true right. There follows a gradual ascent across open meadows and scree slopes, and past Gaddi encampments to reach the base of an impressive waterfall. Ascend the trail to the true right of the waterfall before crossing the river to a series of meadows referred to as **Thamsar** (3750m). This is by far the best campsite before Thamsar Pass, a further four to five hours away.

Day 9: Thamsar to Panhartu via Thamsar Pass

7–8 hours, 14km

The spectacular views from the Thamsar Pass are a just reward for the long climb up from Bara Bhangal. To the south they extend down the forested slopes to the Siwalik hills, while to the north are the peaks of the Pir Panjal. The immediacy of the peaks and snowfields also underline the accomplishment of crossing a second challenging pass in less than a week.

From **Thamsar** the trail gradually climbs on the true left of the valley, passing a prominent side valley and glacier to the east. After 3km or 4km, negotiate the scree and boulder fields to reach a **glacial lake** (4100m). Look for the rock cairns en route. The trail winds above scree slopes on the true right of the lake. This leads to a higher glacial lake at the base of the pass.

Crossing the snowfield leads to a prominent ridgeline defining the crest of the Dhaula Dhar. The **Thamsar Pass** (4710m) is marked by Hindu tridents and prayer flags high above the rolling landscape of the **Kangra Valley** and the Indian Plains.

The initial, steep descent from the pass reaches a large **glacial lake** (4370m). Continue to a series of alpine pastures – and potential campsites if coming from the opposite direction. There follows a steep descent to the meadow at **Panhartu** (3580m). It takes around three hours to reach camp from the pass.

The meadows in the vicinity of Panhartu attract many Gaddi shepherds on their spring migration to the high pastures beyond Bara Bhangal. The meadow is at the confluence of the river flowing from the Thamsar Pass and two other streams that form the upper reaches of the **Uhl River**, which eventually flows into the Beas River at Mandi.

Day 10: Panhartu to Rajgundha

6 hours, 15km

A return to the land of conifers, oaks and open meadows with time to visit the Hindu villages in this remote corner of the upper Kangra Valley.

From **Panhartu**, the trail initially follows the true right of the valley. It descends across a series of permanent snow bridges for 2km to 3km to reach a well-defined trail on the true left of the valley. The trail leads through a mixed forest of rhododendron, oak and spruce before the valley opens out just above the *dhabas* and a Forest Rest House at **Palachak** (2800m).

If time is at a premium, there is a daily bus service and shared taxis from Palachak

that ply the route on down the Uhl Valley to **Mandi**. If not, continue across the concrete bridge just below the village to the true right or west side of the valley. Continue through a forest of spruce and oak to the fields of corn, beans and potatoes near **Rajgundha** (2620m). There is a campsite beside the Forest Rest House.

Day 11: Rajgundha to Bir

5–6 hours, 12km

The descent to Bir can be completed in a long morning with time to reach **Dharamsala** the same day.

From **Rajgundha**, the trail continues on the true right (west) of the Uhl Valley. The trail leads through spruce, oak and rhododendron forest as it gradually ascends to **Billing** (2800m), a favourite haunt for paragliding. There is a dirt road from here down to Bir, however, if intent to complete the trek on foot, head down the forest trail shortcut that considerably lessens the distance. The descent to **Bir** (1450m) can be completed in a couple of hours.

PIN PARVATI TO SPITI

Duration 6 days
Distance 87km
Difficulty demanding
Start Basholi
Finish Mudh
Nearest Town Manali
Transport bus/taxi
Summary A spectacular traverse from the forests and verdant meadows of the Parvati Valley to the Buddhist villages in the trans-Himalaya region of Spiti.

This is a great trek for the well-prepared trekker. Follow trails ascending the Parvati Valley and traverse the main Himalaya Range to the trans-Himalayan region of Spiti. At times the stages are challenging following ill-defined trails, ascending narrow rock gullies and crossing glaciers in the vicinity of the Pin Parvati Pass. En route savour the magnificent campsites in the Great Himalaya National Park.

The trek can be extended to Kinnaur via the Tarik La – allow an additional four to five days (see p127).

PLANNING

When to Trek

The route over the Pin Parvati Pass is normally open by mid-June, although it may be hard ascending the snow slopes below the pass. The Parvati Valley is subject to monsoon rains in July and August. The ideal time to trek is mid-September until mid-October before the winter snows settle on the pass.

What to Bring

A tent, stove, cooking gear and food supplies for the entire trek are required. An ice axe, harness, karabiners and length of rope are also necessary for crossing the glaciers in the vicinity of the Pin Parvati Pass.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 5 Kullu Valley, Parbati Valley & Central Lahaul*. Also refer to the US Military U502 series 1:250,000, NI 43-4 ref Shimla for the Parbati Valley section of the trek and *N1 44-1 ref Chini* for the Pin Valley section in Spiti.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

From Manali, take the bus to Kullu (Rs 30, 1½ hours) and connect to Manikaran (Rs 38, three hours). A taxi will cost Rs 1300. From Manikaran, there are two buses to Basholi daily (Rs 20, 1½ hours).

From Mudh, there is a daily bus to Kaza (Rs 50, 2½ to three hours). From Kaza there are daily buses to Manali (Rs 152, 10 hours).

THE TREK (see maps p108–9 & 113)

Day 1: Basholi to Khir Ganga

4–5 hours, 12km

There are two routes to reach Khir Ganga. One is to follow the true left of the Parvati Valley past the dam works at the junction of the Tosh Nullah to the village of Nakthang (2390m) before crossing the Parvati River and continuing to Khir Ganga. The other is to take the slightly longer detour via Pulga and then follow the forest trail all the way on the true left of the Parvati Valley (described here). Whichever route you follow get an early start to ensure you have time for a dip in the hot springs at Khir Ganga.

From the ramshackle bazaar at **Basholi** (2200m) cross the **bridge** over the **Parvati River** and head up to the village of **Pulga**

(2220m). There are a few teashops as well as a Forest Rest House that are a far better option than spending the night at Basholi. The forest trail to Khir Ganga leads through mixed oak and conifer forest before passing the huge dam works at the junction of the **Tosh Nullah** on the far side of the Parvati Valley. After about 8km the trail meets the alternative route from Basholi before continuing through forest to the open meadow at **Khir Ganga** (2920m) The *dhabas* and hot springs are a further 100m up the meadow.

The lodges at Khir Ganga mainly cater for foreigners and pilgrims enjoying a day or two respite from **Manikaran** and the more crowded spots in the Parvati Valley. The hot springs are administered by a committee from Pulga and the nearby villages. The area is well maintained and there is no charge for bathing, although a donation is appreciated. Observe the rules – no mixed bathing, no nude bathing, no bathing after dark and no bathing while intoxicated – and you will do just fine.

Day 2: Khir Ganga to Thakur Khan

6 hours, 15km

After indulging in the delights of the hot springs it is good to head off along the less frequented trail that leads through open meadows and conifer forest and glimpse the high peaks of the Himalaya Range.

From the lower meadow of **Khir Ganga** ascend the trail through mixed oak and conifer forest and past Gujar settlements before reaching the beautiful meadow at **Tunda Bhoj** (3400m). This stage should take not more than four hours and there is a **dhaba** and some fine **camping spots** if deciding to have a short day.

From **Tunda Bhoj** there are two routes and it is essential to check with the *dhaba* owner before setting off as to whether the pulley bridge is in working order at Thakur Khan. If it is, then head up the true left, south bank of the valley, for 3km to a foot bridge over the Parvati River. The trail then ascends a series of open meadows until reaching the pulley bridge opposite Thakur Khan. Cross the pulley bridge and select a campsite.

If there is any doubt regarding the pulley bridge then remain on the true left of the valley all the way to Thakur Khan. However, this trail is less well defined and includes a few scrambles over large boulders where a length of rope might be useful for less sure-footed trekkers or laden porters.

Thakur Khan (3550m) is located opposite the confluence of the **Dibibokri** and **Parvati** Rivers. It also marks the site of the original dam on the Parvati River. The abandoned remains of the construction can still be seen as a further example of lack of environmental concern on the part of the relevant authorities. There is also an ongoing debate as to how permission was granted in the first place since this upper section of the Parvati Valley is on the border of the Great Himalaya National Park.

Day 3: Thakur Khan to Mantalai

6–7 hours, 16km

A day to appreciate the high peaks and hanging glaciers that enclose the upper Parvati Valley. The stage can also be split with an intermediary camp on one of the many meadows that are renowned for wildflowers.

After leaving **Thakur Khan** the trail ascends the true left of the valley for 3km to a side river that requires careful negotiation. Immediately after crossing the river, the trail descends to the **Pandu Bridge** – a natural rock formation over the Parvati River. According to Hindu legend the bridge marks the route the Pandava brothers made on their way to Spiti and Tibet. However, for lesser mortals the crossing should not present any difficulties. The trail then winds across open meadows for 2km to 3km to a turn in the valley from where the outflow from Mantalai Lake can be seen. From this point, it is a further 4km to the lake. Just below the lake there is a steep 100m ascent through boulders to a small Hindu shrine with a stone lingam and brass bell marking the entrance to the lake. Continue alongside the lake to a choice of fine campsites.

Mantalai Lake (4020m) is fed by the snow from the surrounding mountains and glaciers. As the snows melt during the day the waters rise and the terminal moraine (at the entrance to the lake) backfills, creating the lake. At night the lake drains slowly through the moraine and by morning the lake is nothing more than a huge expanse of mud and quicksand that can prove treacherous to the unwary. A rest day at the lake is

recommended before climbing to the base of the Pin Parvati Pass.

Day 4: Mantalai to Plateau Camp

3–4 hours, 12km

A challenging stage to the base of the Pir Parvati Pass that affords a near 270-degree vista of high peaks and glaciers that define the main Himalaya Range.

From **Mantalai** camp, head around the northeast perimeter of the lake. Watch out for rock cairns before entering the moraine field. If the going gets tough and there is an inordinate amount of boulder hopping, then it is imperative to relocate the trail rather than losing energy at this crucial time of the day. There are a couple of river crossings to negotiate. In the morning they should not present a problem. However, it is a different story if trekking down from the pass, as the streams will turn into torrents by mid-afternoon and care will need to be taken.

After the second main side river crossing, continue through the moraine a further 1km before heading up a side gully. Again watch out for rock cairns. The route up the gully is more of a scramble. The initial 150m ascent is steep, followed by a short traverse before a second 200m ascent that requires particular patience to ensure that no loose boulders are dislodged on the trekkers below. Indeed, it is imperative that each trekker and porter clears one section before the next person follows. Once at the top of the gully the hard work is over. There is a grassy knoll from where there are bird's-eye views down the Parvati Valley. Traverse the grassy ridge above the rock gully and head up and around to a sandy plateau and campsite (4550m).

Day 5: Plateau Camp to Pin Valley Camp via Pin Parvati Pass

5–6 hours, 12km

The immediacy of the high peaks and tumbling glaciers provides an exhilarating highlight when crossing the Pin Parvati Pass. The pass also marks the watershed between the verdant, forested ridges of the Parvati Valley and the stark mountainside of Spiti.

From **Plateau Camp** (4550m) ascend the scree slope to the true right of the snowfield flowing from the high ridge near to the pass. The 300m ascent is tiring and there is little evidence of a trail to a higher scree plateau (5040m), and an alternative **campsite**. There follows a further steep 200m ascent that leads to within striking distance of the top. The pass is a small col immediately to the south of a prominent rock monolith. The traverse up to the pass is straightforward although care should be taken early in the season when there are hidden crevasses. Once off the snowfield there is a steep heart-thumping 50m ascent to the pass. Time taken from camp is around 2½ to three hours.

The **Pin Parvati Pass** (5320m) is marked by a rock cairn and colourful Buddhist prayer flags. On one side, the views extend across to the glaciers and high peaks on the far side of the pass, while to the north are the jagged peaks and rocky spires that guard the route to Spiti.

Descend to the true left of the glacier and avoid the obvious crevassed areas. When in doubt, rope up and ensure that the porters do likewise. After about 1km the route descends to the upper scree slopes before continuing on down on the true left of the main stream flowing from the snowfields. It's a long, gradual descent to the valley floor but the campsite is visible from the upper scree slopes and this should act as a suitable incentive to keep on going. Once down in the valley there is a river crossing. A snow bridge may be in place early in the season; if not, wet boots are the order of the afternoon before continuing onto a grassy, sheltered campsite at **Pin Valley Camp** (4250m). Time from the pass is around three hours.

Day 6: Pin Valley Camp to Mudh

8 hours, 20km

A long but rewarding day with time to appreciate the stark landscape of the trans-Himalaya and the huge catchment area of the Pin National Park. There have been reports of snow leopards roaming the upper stretches of the valleys, and herds of *bharal* grazing the high pastures in summer. There are also road developments in the lower reaches of the valley that will eventually form a new highway linking Spiti, Kinnaur and Shimla.

From Pin Valley Camp the trail descends alongside the true left bank or north side of the **Pin River**. As with previous stages, watch out for rock cairns when crossing the

many scree slopes. The trail also necessitates a number of side river crossings that should not present any problems in the morning. After three to four hours, or around 10km, the **Pin Valley** meets a valley from the southeast leading to the **Tarik La** and Kinnaur. Just above the confluence there is a choice of grassy campsites (3900m), useful if trekking from Mudh. This is also where the trail meets the dirt road from Mudh. There are, however, plenty of places where the trekking trail takes a shortcut from the road on the way down to Mudh. From the confluence of the rivers to Mudh takes a further four hours.

The village of **Mudh** (3770m) consists of around 20 whitewashed houses amid fields of barley. The *mani* walls, chortens and small gompa refect the prevalent Buddhist culture of the region. There are campsites just above the village and a number of lodges.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: TO KINNAUR VIA THE TARIK LA

3 days, 34km

An ideal follow-on after traversing the Pin Parvati Pass that involves a further traverse of the main Himalaya Range to the verdant Kapnu Valley and Kinnaur. The trek also avoids most of the road development from Mudh in Spiti.

From the base of the Pin Parvati Pass continue down the valley to the track extending from Mudh and cross the bridge to Paldor above the confluence of the **Pin Valley** and the valley leading down from the **Tarik La** and camp for the night (Day 6 of the Pin Parvati Pass & Spiti trek). On Day 7, cross the Pin River and head up the valley towards the Tarik La. It's a gradual climb for the first few hours before a steep climb to the **Tarik La** (4850m) that defines the crest of the Himalaya Range. Striking views extend north across the barren ridges of Spiti while to the south are the snow-capped peaks of Kinnaur. The geographic contrast between Spiti and Kinnaur is evident after descending to the alpine meadows (4050m). After the pass crossing of the previous two days, Day 8 is a comparatively easy stage as the trail heads down through meadows (carpeted in wildflowers) to the shepherd camp at **Kara** (3500m). Then it's further down through a copse of birch, elm and hemlock to an idyllic camp at **Muling** (3250m). On the final Day 9, the trail winds across meadows before descending through mixed forest to the small settlement of **Humti** (2900m). Its then a short, steep decent to the Kapnu River and the village of **Kapnu** (2470m).

From Kapnu there are taxis and a daily bus to **Katgoan** and **Wangtu** with onward transport to **Shimla** or up the Sutlej Valley through **Spiti**, **Lahaul** and back to the **Kullu Valley** and **Manali**.

A VILLAGE CALLED MUDH

For most trekkers the memorable views of the Himalaya focus on the soaring peaks. Yet there is another dimension to the Himalaya that can be appreciated from the village of Mudh. Camping on the opposite side of the valley, the village with its whitewashed houses and tiny gompa is seen beneath the striking exposed rock strata that rise for 1000m above the valley floor. The perspective reflects the recent geological evolution of the trans-Himalaya with the rock strata reflecting a crucial stage of the Himalaya in the making. This offers an alternative perspective and a stunning contrast to views of snow-capped peaks normally associated with the Himalaya.

MCLEOD GANJ & THE KANGRA VALLEY

McLeod Ganj's stunning location above the vast Indian plains and beneath the backdrop of the shimmering peaks of the Dhaula Dhar – combined with the presence of the 14th Dalai Lama and his government in exile – have contributed to its popularity among trekkers keen to explore the trails across the Dhaula Dhar.

HISTORY

The ancient town of Kangra, 20km south of Dharamsala, is an important indicator of the region's early history. Once in a position of great strategic importance, it gave credence to the local saying 'he who holds

the fort holds the hills'. This factor was to determine the history of Kangra and many of the other Himalayan kingdoms.

During the Moghul period, the local rajahs paid tribute to the emperor's court before the famous rajah Sanser Chand sought to establish a huge Himalayan empire that extended far beyond the Kangra Valley. An era of expansion followed until the Sikhs exerted their control over the Punjab Himalaya.

After the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, the British established administration of Kangra, Kullu and Lahaul at Dharamsala, which it held until 1947. In those times, the hill tracks provided a delightful walk between Dharamsala and Shimla, while the colonial buildings in Dharamsala and McLeod Ganj provide a fitting testimony to the era.

ENVIRONMENT

The forests beneath the Dhaula Dhar support black bear, forest leopard, serow, goral and kakor. Brown bears may be spotted foraging at higher elevations close to the alpine meadows.

Birds of prey, including the golden eagle, kestrel and lammergeier, soar above the ridges of the Dhaula Dhar. The forests and glades above McLeod Ganj attract a variety of birdlife that migrate each summer from the Indian Plains.

Wildflower enthusiasts may be attracted to the meadows beneath the Indrahar Pass or close to Kareri Lake, although large herds of goats and sheep heavily graze these pastures.

ACCESS TOWN

McLeod Ganj (p140) is worth a visit, a retreat from the Indian Plains, providing an opportunity to appreciate the vibrant Tibetan culture before heading off on a trek.

INDRAHAR PASS

Duration 5 days
Distance 57km
Difficulty moderate
Start McLeod Ganj
Finish Lamu
Transport bus/truck
Summary A spectacular traverse of the Dhaula Dhar following Gaddi shepherd trails to the Ravi and Chamba Valleys.

The ridges over the Dhaula Dhar, though well-travelled, do not lend themselves to easy trekking. This trek over the Indrahar Pass is no exception, even though it follows one of the more established trails used by Gaddi shepherds en route to their summer grazing pastures in the upper Ravi Valley and Lahaul.

The ascent to the Indrahar Pass involves a continual climb over scree and boulders. The views compensate – to the south, there are spectacular views of the Indian Plains; to the north is the sacred peak of Mani Mahesh Kailas and the snow-capped Pir Panjal. Beyond the pass, an ill-defined trail leads through Hindu villages and temples to the upper Ravi Valley. There is an opportunity to extend the trek to Mani Mahesh Kailas or over the Kugti Pass to Lahaul.

For the trekker on a tight itinerary, consider the trek up to Triund plus a day to wander the meadows at the base of the Indrahar Pass before returning back down to McLeod Ganj.

PLANNING

When to Trek

If you are prepared to trek on snow, it is possible to cross the Indrahar Pass in early May. By June the snow begins to melt at higher elevations and the Gaddi shepherds set out on their summer migration. In July and August, the region takes the full brunt of the monsoon rain. September and October are ideal trekking months, with settled conditions occasionally lasting into November.

What to Bring

A tent, stove and cooking gear ensure a flexible alternative to staying in shelter huts and village temples. Food supplies for a minimum of three days should be carried although you can pick up food at Triund and Machetar.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 4 Chamba, Dhaula Dhar Passes, Pangi Valley & Western Lahaul*. The relevant map of the US Military U502 series 1:250,000, *NI 43-15* is hard to obtain and may be classified due to its proximity to India's border with Pakistan.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

From Lamu, there is a late afternoon bus that goes directly to Dharamsala (Rs 220, 11 hours, arriving at 3am or 4am). There are also several buses each day to Chamba (Rs 60, three hours). Alternatively head down for an hour to the main Holi to Chamba road and catch a bus or truck from there.

THE TREK (see map p110)

Day 1: McLeod Ganj to Triund

3–4 hours, 14km

The well-defined trail to Triund will present few problems even though it entails a climb of nearly 1100m. The bird's-eye views to McLeod Ganj, Dharamsala and the Kangra Valley compensate while the frequent tea stalls en route help to ease the strain of the first day out on the trail. The campsite at Triund is spectacular. Set on an alpine ridge beneath the imposing backdrop of the Dhaula Dhar it is an ideal place to acclimatise before crossing the Indrahar Pass.

From **McLeod Ganj** (1750m) walk straight out of the bazaar and commence the trek. Head up past the Mountaineering Institute and continue for 2km to the water storage tank. Turn left and then leave the road and head up along a track through deodar forest to the Dharamkot ridge (2100m) above the village. From here the trail is well defined all the way up to Triund. After 2km the trail is joined with a trail coming directly up from the village. There is a very welcome tea stall after 5km (2400m) from where you can see the Forest Huts at Triund. There is still a fair way to go as the trail winds past shady stands of oak and rhododendron to more tea stalls. It takes a further hour that involves ascending the many switchbacks up the last 200m to **Triund** (2850m).

There are comfortable rooms for Rs 975 foreign trekkers, Rs 375 domestic trekkers at the Forest Rest House at Triund. However, they need to be booked in advance from the **Forest Office** (☎ 245887) conveniently located in Dharamsala. There are also a couple of basic private lodges charging more reasonable rates. There is a choice of campsites along the alpine ridge at Triund. However, water is only available from a pump near the Forest Rest House. There are also a number of tea shops and a private hut on the ridge above the Forest Rest House that offers basic accommodation. A camping fee of Rs 100 is payable to the Forest Rest House caretaker. It is disappointing though that an abundance of toilet paper, wrappers and plastic bottles spoils the magnificent campsite. A clean-up program organised by the travel agents in Triund and the Forest Office is long overdue.

Day 2: Triund to Lahesh Cave

3–4 hours, 8km

An ascent across the open meadows to the base of the Dhaula Dhar before ascending to Lahesh Cave allows time to prepare and acclimatise before crossing the Indrahar Pass the next day.

From **Triund**, ascend the trail to the west of the meadow that leads through oak forest and continues for 1km to a Shiva temple regarded by the local people as the Gateway to the Himalaya. If setting off in the early morning you may be fortunate to see musk deer above the temple. The trail then ascends to an alpine ridge from where the route to the Indrahar Pass can be appreciated. It is not as steep as it looks! There is also a tea stall just on the southern margins of the meadow. The huge alpine meadow extending to the base of the scree slopes is known as Laka Got (3250m).

Continue across the meadow for a further 2km (about 40 minutes) to the base of the pass. Here there are some fine campsites that offer a comfortable alternative to sleeping at **Lahesh Cave** (3600m). The route to the cave ascends the main scree ridge. It is not hard to follow as the 300m climb is marked with rock cairns that lead to a huge rock overhang that could accommodate a sizeable number of porters, shepherds or sheep. Nearby there are a few grassy ridges on which you can pitch a tent. The water supply comes from a spring line in the gully to the immediate west of the Lahesh Cave.

Day 3: Lahesh Cave to Chatru Parao via Indrahar Pass

5–6 hours, 10km

This is a demanding stage. Yet the views from the Indrahar Pass are magnificent,

extending south to the Kangra Valley while to the north the snow-capped peaks of the Pir Panjal and distinctive peak of Mani Mahesh Kailas (5656m) make the morning's efforts worthwhile.

The time from **Lahesh Cave** to the pass is between three to four hours. After setting out it is essential to watch out for rock cairns. Keep an eye out also for the route up the steeper gullies; the scrambles over the large boulders, although by no means technical, are not easy. Early in the season some sections of the route will also be under snow, which might make the going that much harder.

Throughout the climb, the route remains on the true right of the main gully and becomes progressively steeper, in particularly the last 300m before you reach the crest of the Dhaula Dhar. There follows a straightforward traverse to the **Indrahar Pass** (4420m) that is defined by a prominent trident reflecting the Hindu trinity of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma.

The descent from the pass is initially very steep, bordering on technical, and a top rope might come in useful if the rocks are icy down a tight gully strewn with loose boulders. On reaching the base of the pass, cross the stream flowing from **Nag Tal**, a small lake immediately to the west of the Indrahar Pass. The trail is often slippery and tiring on down to a camp (3700m) at **Chatru Parao** that consists of a few shepherd huts set in an open meadow.

Day 4: Chatru Parao to Kuarsi

5–6 hours, 15km

After the exhilaration of crossing the Indrahar Pass, this stage is far less demanding. The trail heads through lush vegetation and across summer grazing meadows before heading on down to the village of Kuarsi – the highest permanent settlement in the valley.

From **Chatru Parao** head down the true left of the valley. At times the trail is little more than a goat track. Early in the season, it would be worthwhile abandoning the trail, and descending across the snow bridges on the main river bed. After about 5km, or around two hours, the trail crosses the valley over a permanent snow bridge and ascends steeply to an open meadow. There is a spring line here, and an ideal rest spot. Continue down the true right of the valley, following a trail more suitable for goats than trekkers. The trail peters out in places, particularly across a series of meadows, before finally descending to the village of **Kuarsi** (2730m).

There is a campsite above the main spring line in the village, or continue for 10 minutes to a secluded camp alongside the main river. The village temple at Kuarsi can provide shelter for the night.

Day 5: Kuarsi to Lamu

4 hours, 10km

The development of roads in the upper Ravi Valley undermines the necessity of climbing the ridge over to Machetar. The trail now heads straight down the valley to the trailhead at Lamu. In the next few seasons the road will extend beyond Lamu and will eventually reach Kuarsi.

From Kuarsi follow the recently upgraded trail that leads down the true left of the valley. En route you will be rewarded with glimpses back to the high ridges of the Dhaula Dhar as well as the Mani Mahesh Range to the north. It should take no more than four hours to reach the village of **Lamu** (1950m). If there is no sign of a bus or a shared taxi continue down to the village of **Dali** on the Holi to Chamba road. Taking the shortcuts, this final stage should take around an hour before waiting for the inevitably overcrowded bus heading to Chamba.

KARERI LAKE CIRCUIT

Duration 6 days
Distance 65km
Difficulty easy
Start Stowari
Finish McLeod Ganj
Transport taxi
Summary A short, accessible trek through Hindu villages to Kareri Lake and the spectacular ridges of the Dhaula Dhar Range.

The trek to Kareri Lake is a fine alternative to the trek over the Indrahar Pass. The itinerary does not cross any passes and there are no demanding days. The trek also ascends relatively remote trails through magnificent

forests and secluded Hindu villages not yet connected to the road. Kareri Lake is also an ideal base from which to explore the upper ridges of the Dhaula Dhar to savour the views across the Kangra Valley as well as glimpse the high peaks that extend beyond the Pir Panjal to the Himalaya Range.

PLANNING

When to Trek

September through October is ideal for trekking. However, to witness the migration of Gaddi shepherds to Kareri Lake, you would need to trek in May. By June most of the snow in the vicinity of the lake has melted. The region is subject to heavy monsoon rain from July to early September.

What to Bring

A tent, stove and cooking gear are required. Food supplies for the entire trek should also be carried.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 4 Chamba, Dhaula Dhar Passes, Pangi Valley & Western Lahaul*. Be aware that the ridge profiles and river courses in the vicinity of this trek are inaccurate on this map.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

From the bazaar at McLeod Ganj, it is 7km to the trailhead at Stowari. Local taxis are the best option and will set you back around Rs 200 to Rs 250.

THE TREK (see map p110–1)

Day 1: Stowari to Kareri Village

5 hours, 15km

An introduction to the secluded Hindu villages and trails beneath the Dhaula Dhar. This is an opportunity to ascend the chir, oak and rhododendron forest to vibrant Kareri village.

From **Stowari** (1750m), follow the bridle track that descends through the chir forest for 5km to the **Bhote Khola** and the small bazaar at **Ghera** (1325m). The descent should take no more than 1½ hours. Be sure to visit Ravi's tea stall in the centre of the market. Ravi lives in Kareri village and claims to complete the morning commute from Kareri to Ghera in around 30 minutes. On a good day, the uphill return takes around an hour. For lesser mortals, cross the bridge over the Bhote Khosi, turn left and head along the trail to a small settlement and a stream that marks the outflow of the Kareri River – the main water supply being piped down to a dam project just below Ghera. Continue past a well-attended government school to the village of **Seri** (1470m). The trail then ascends gradually through rhododendron forest until it meets the bridge over the fast-flowing Kareri River. Here the trail splits. If continuing to **Kareri** village (1800m), head up the trail for 15 to 20 minutes – or 30 minutes up to the **Forest Rest House** (1850m; foreign trekkers Rs 975, Indian trekkers Rs 350). If camping, continue alongside the river for 1km to a meadow (1730m) big enough to accommodate several trekking groups at the same time. The farming settlement on the far side of the campsite is particularly attractive. If you are short on porters, this is the place to go; offers to stay in this part of the village reflect the traditional hospitality of the foothills.

Day 2: Kareri Village to Harote

3–3½ hours, 10km

This intermediary stage is recommended for acclimatisation before heading up to Kareri Lake. Follow the less-frequented trails through magnificent rhododendron and ancient oak forest. There are vantage points to view tiny settlements and forested ridges that extend to the Kangra Valley.

From Kareri campsite you will need your guide to direct you up and around the myriad village tracks to the main trail leading to Harote. If staying at the Forest Rest House the trail is easier to follow, as it ascends directly above the village. Once beyond the outlying fields, the trail enters a holly oak and spruce forest, and welcome shade. It continues around to the Kareri stream after 5km or around 1½ hours before clambering over two huge boulders that serve as a bridge over the watercourse. A steep 200m gets the heart pumping before the trail gradually ascends through mixed forest and open meadows before it rounds the contours to rejoin the Kareri stream. Cross the bridge over the stream to the true left or east bank and continue for a further 10 to 15 minutes to a secluded meadow known as **Harote** (2450m). There is a spring just above the campsite.

Day 3: Harote to Kareri Lake

2 hours, 4km

This is a short stage that ensures you reach Kareri Lake by mid-morning. This allows ample time to ascend the alpine meadows beneath the Dhaula Dhar. How far you climb depends on your endurance and capacity to absorb the spectacular views across the Indian Plains. If heading in the direction of the Bleni Pass, the views to the north extend across the Dhaula Dhar and Pir Panjal to the 6000m peaks of the Kishtwar Himalaya.

The trail heads up a narrow valley alongside the tumbling waters of the Kareri stream. The trail is shaded by oak and conifer forest, while there are a number of Gaddi shepherd huts en route to the lake. The trail remains on the true left of the valley until it practically reaches the outflow from the lake. Cross the boulder-strewn stream to the Shiva temple and **Dharamsala** located just above **Kareri Lake** (2950m). The best campsite is on the meadows to the west of the lake. It is worth noting that the size of the lake has greatly diminished in the last 20 years Whether this is attributed to global warming or to more local causes is a matter for debate.

Day 4: Return to Kareri Village

3–4 hours 15km

Retrace the route for Days 2 and 3 to the original campsite below Kareri village or to stay at the Forest Rest House. There is ample opportunity to wander the fields of corn, barley and mustard as well as gaining vantage points for views of the Dhaula Dhar and the route across the forested ridges and the village of Bal.

Day 5: Kareri Village to Bal

4½–5 hours, 14km

This stage ascends the secluded trails of the Dhaula Dhar to the village of Bal. Following this itinerary is well worth the effort, although if time is at a premium head down to Ghera and up to Stowari and you should be back in McLeod Ganj by early afternoon.

If camping below **Kareri** village then allow an extra 30 minutes to ascend to the Forest Rest House (1850m). From there the trail continues around the contours – with fine views back down to the **Kangra Valley** – to the village of Khari Bhai (1800m) before a long steep descent to the Bhote Kosi a few kilometres up from Ghera. Cross the boulder bridge to **Roa** village (1510m) There is a delightful resting spot – and potential campsite just above the village before heading up a side valley. After 2km the trail heads steeply up forest of bamboo, oak and conifers. The 200m climb can fairly be described as taxing. After the best part of an hour, the trail reaches a ridge that affords commanding views across to Kareri village and the Dhaula Dhar. It's a further 20 to 30 minutes around to the village of **Bal** (1860m) and 1km on to a camp (1890m) alongside the upper course of a tributary flowing from Laka Got. Watch out for troupes of inquisitive langur monkeys and pairs of remarkably tame blue magpie. There is also a small lodge just beyond Bal village.

Day 6: Bal Village to McLeod Ganj via Dharamkot

2–2½ hours, 7km

This is a short stage to complete the 'half circuit' back to McLeod Ganj. The stage includes an initial ascent through mixed forest to the Dharamkot Ridge and the trail to Triund before heading back down to McLeod Ganj. Also consider extending the trek to Triund and the base of the Indrahar pass (see p128).

From the campsite just beyond **Bal** cross the bridge over the main tributary and ascend the trail through mixed forest to the Dharamkot Ridge (2100m). The climb is steep in places but should take no more than an hour. From the ridge it is possible to get a lift by jeep to McLeod Ganj. It is also possible to head back down via **Dharamkot** village. However, the most direct route down is through deodar forest to the Mountaineering Institute and **McLeod Ganj** (1750m), allow about an hour to complete.

BRAHMAUR & THE RAVI VALLEY

This isolated corner of Himachal Pradesh consists of Chamba, the district headquarters, and the ancient capital of Brahmaur. It is enclosed by the Pir Panjal and Dhaula Dhar ranges, and drained by the

headwaters of the Ravi River. Only a handful of trekkers make their way to Brahmaur. Yet for those who do, the possibilities abound, as the treks offer just a taste of the opportunities that rival those out of Manali and McLeod Ganj.

HISTORY

Historical records indicate that Chamba state has maintained an uninterrupted cultural tradition since the 9th century. Prior to that the capital was at Brahmaur, where well-preserved temples reflect the cultural high points of this era. In spite of its important strategic position, Chamba paid only a nominal tribute to the Moghuls and at times its borders extended well beyond the Ravi Valley.

Following the wars with the British in the 1840s, the Sikhs were granted all the country between the Ravi and Indus Rivers. However, it was agreed that the Chamba region, which then included the nearby Pangi Valley and Lower Lahaul, would be under British administration.

In 1868 the hill station of Dalhousie was founded. Chamba had hopelessly inadequate roads and forest trails, which were upgraded and surveyed as British Public Works Department and Forest Departments extended into the region. Yet even today the region has hardly kept pace with the rest of the state. A seasonal 4WD road over the Sach Pass, linking Chamba to the Pangi Valley and Lahaul, that was on the drawing board for years has only recently been completed.

ENVIRONMENT

Beneath the Pir Panjal are forests of oak and blue pine that at higher elevations give way to birch groves and alpine meadows, which lie beneath the glaciers, and peaks that rise to over 6000m.

Wildlife in the area includes black bears and leopards in the forests above the villages. At higher elevations, there is the chance of spotting serow and goral, while markhor and brown bears may be seen close to the alpine meadows.

Birds of prey such as lammergeier and kestrel are seen at high altitudes. A variety of dippers, woodpeckers, minivets and thrushes are found in the mixed forests.

Wildflower enthusiasts may spend extra days camping in the vicinity of the alpine meadows en route to Mani Mahesh. The pastures in the valleys near Kugti Pass are

THE GADDI SHEPHERDS

The Kangra and Chamba districts are the home of the Gaddi – Hindu shepherds who tend their flocks on the Dhaula Dhar and the Pir Panjal in summer.

The Gaddi can be distinguished by the *chola* – a warm knee-length cloak of natural wool, spun and woven by hand – which they wear tightened at the waist by a black woollen cord.

The Gaddi trace their origins to when the Rajput settlers made their way to the Himalayan foothills, although it was not until the late Moghul period that families chose to settle in Brahmaur and Chamba. The annual Gaddi migration, like that of other shepherd groups in the West Himalaya, means that bridges are reconstructed and mountain trails maintained. This helps to ensure their own safe passage over the passes, and is greatly appreciated by anyone trekking in their footsteps.

The Gaddi migration over the mountain passes follows traditional grazing rights. The Gaddi who live in the Kullu Valley follow trails over the Rhotang or Hampta passes to Lahaul before ascending to pastures extending from Chandra Tal to the Baralacha La and the vast Lingti Plains. The Gaddi from Brahmaur and the Ravi Valley head over the Kugti Pass to lower Lahaul and the verdant meadows of the Miyar Nullah. To complete the picture, the Gaddi from the Kangra Valley head to the Dhaula Dhar. Some settle in the vicinity of Kareri Lake, for instance, while others cross the Indrahar Pass, with a handful continuing to the Miyar Nullah.

The spring migration to the high pastures take about a month to complete, while the return migration is normally undertaken by late August/early September to ensure that the flocks do not have to cross snowbound passes in order to reach their winter habitat in the foothills.

For more details of the Gaddi lifestyle, refer to Christina Noble's *Over the High Passes*.

also very attractive, particularly in July and August.

ACCESS TOWN

Brahmaur (p138) – the ancient capital of the Ravi Valley is bypassed by the majority of trekkers visiting Himachal.

MANI MAHESH KAILAS

Duration 3 days
Distance 30km
Difficulty easy
Start/Finish Hadsar
Nearest Town Brahmaur
Transport bus/shared taxi
Summary Follow the pilgrim trail to Mani Mahesh Lake and the sacred peak of Mani Mahesh Kailas.

Many thousands of Hindu pilgrims complete the trek to Mani Mahesh Lake each season. While the origins of the trek are obscure, it would have evolved because Mani Mahesh Kailas (5656m) is close to a main source of the Ravi River – one of the five main tributaries of the Indus.

Prior to the main pilgrimage in late August, a fair is held in Brahmaur with folk dances and festivities attended by villagers and a sizeable gathering of Gaddi shepherds. Following the ceremony, the high priests lead the pilgrims from Brahmaur to the shores of Mani Mahesh Lake – although nowadays many other pilgrims drive to the trailhead at Hadsar.

Beyond Hadsar the well-defined trail and large numbers of *dhabas* make this an easy trek. There are *dhabas* every few kilometres between Hadsar and Mani Mahesh Lake, together with basic pilgrim shelters. These are often crowded during the main pilgrimage in August. It is not advisable to stay overnight at Mani Mahesh Lake (4170m) unless you are well acclimatised.

The trek is also an ideal warm-up before tackling the more demanding traverse of the Kugti Pass (see p135).

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trek can be completed from the end of May, although the lake will be under snow until at least mid-June. July and August bring monsoon rain, although this is the time when most pilgrims trek. Mid-September to mid-October is ideal for trekking.

What to Bring

Walking boots, a reliable windproof and waterproof jacket and appropriate warm clothing are essential. There are many *dhabas*, allowing the trek to be completed without a tent.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 4 Chamba, Dhaula Dhar Passes, Pangi Valley & Western Lahaul*. Also refer to the US Military U502 series 1:250,000, *NI 43-16 ref Palampur*.

Permits & Regulations

Although there is no special permit to undertake the trek, you may be requested to register your passport details at Hadsar before undertaking the trek during the main pilgrimage in August.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

There are three or four buses a day from Brahmaur to Hadsar (Rs 20, one hour). There are also shared taxis for Rs 30.

THE TREK (see map p110)

Day 1: Hadsar to Dancho

3 hours, 7km

This is an introduction to an ancient pilgrim trail. The trail winds through a forest of oak, pine, beech and elder to the meadow at Dancho. The established camp is the ideal place to rest and acclimatise before ascending to Mani Mahesh Lake, as well as taking in the fine views north of the peaks and glaciers of the Pir Panjal Range.

Before commencing the pilgrimage from **Hadsar** (2150m), ascend the stone steps above the bazaar and follow the trail to the **small temple** where offerings are made. The well-defined trail descends alongside the **Mani Mahesh River** before winding up through mixed forest to a series of meadows.

After 5km cross the bridge to the true right of the valley and ascend 2km to the complex of *dhabas* and shelters at Dancho. There is also a small **campsite** about

1km before **Dancho** (2900m) on a meadow above the river.

Day 2: Dancho to Mani Mahesh Lake & Return

7 hours, 16km

This ia an exhilarating, if somewhat demanding, stage to Mani Mahesh Lake and Mani Mahesh Kailas – the most sacred peak in the region. If time and acclimatisation are not an issue, there are some excellent campsites on the alpine ridges close to the lake, ideal for exploring the nearby valleys and ridges and far removed from the throng of pilgrims.

From Dancho, cross the bridge over the Mani Mahesh River to the true left of the valley. Continue for 2km before recrossing over a wooden bridge to the true right bank. There follows a long climb with many switchbacks as the trail ascends through flowered meadows. The birch trees on the opposite side of the valley provide a reminder of the gain in altitude.

Two hours after leaving camp, there is a line of *dhabas* (3600m) from where the trail to Mani Mahesh Lake is visible. It is a further hour across scree slopes and meadows to the impressive waterfall flowing from the lake. The trail ascends steeply to an open valley ringed by snow-capped peaks. A variety of *dhabas* and shelters are here, where pilgrims prepare for the final stage to the lake.

It is a further 1.5km ascent (about 30 minutes) across grassy ridges to **Mani Mahesh Lake** (4170m). In terms of size and depth, the lake is not particularly impressive. However, its location – directly opposite the peak of Mani Mahesh Kailas and a host of other peaks and hanging glaciers – would inspire even the least devout pilgrim.

There is a small Hindu temple dedicated to Lakshmi Devi beside the lake, where pilgrims pay their respects, and priests cut the hair of any newborn sons.

The descent back to **Dancho** takes around three hours.

SIDE TRIP: BEYOND MANI MAHESH LAKE

2 hours, 5km return

Climb the grassy ridge directly above the lake that marks the route of the trek around the base of **Mani Mahesh Kailas**, a 30km, two-day *kora* (pilgrimage). The first day is to an alpine meadow on the far side of the mountain and the second to **Kugti** village, from where the pilgrims now have the choice of walking or taking a shared jeep back to Hadsar.

Day 3: Dancho to Hadsar

2½–3 hours, 7km

The return trek to **Hadsar** can be completed in the morning, with ample time to return to Brahmaur and Chamba.

KUGTI PASS & LAHAUL

Duration 4 days
Distance 57km
Difficulty moderate–demanding
Start Kugti
Finish Jelma
Nearest Town Brahmaur
Transport bus/taxi/truck
Summary Ascend the Gaddi shepherd trails through Hindu villages and meadows carpeted with wildflowers before completing a rugged traverse of the Pir Panjal Range to Chandra Valley and Lahaul.

While the Kugti Pass is the most regularly crossed pass over the Pir Panjal between Brahmaur and Lahaul, it is by no means easy! Even the Gaddi shepherds regard the pass with caution and will not lead their flocks across until the weather is clear and settled.

Although the route over the pass is not technically demanding, trekkers should be sure-footed, not afraid of the occasional rock scramble, and physically prepared for a long day. Bearing that in mind, the views of Mani Mahesh Kailas, the Dhaula Dhar and the Himalaya Range are well worth it.

En route to the pass, the trail winds through Hindu villages and past Gaddi shepherd encampments. The alpine meadows are carpeted with wildflowers. These offer ideal spots for rest and acclimatisation before completing the traverse to Lahaul and the Chandra Valley.

For those baulking at the challenge of crossing the Kugti Pass, there is the option of spending a few days at one of the campsites before the pass, allowing ample time to admire the mountain panoramas

and identify the wildflowers before heading back down to Brahmaur and Chamba.

PLANNING

When to Trek

Depending on snow conditions, Gaddi shepherds normally cross the Kugti Pass by mid-June. The monsoon rain extends to this region in July and August so the ideal trek time is from mid-September until mid-October, before the first snows settle on the Pir Panjal.

What to Bring

A tent, stove, cooking gear and food supplies for at least four days are necessary. An ice axe and rope should also be carried. Each person should bring at least two water bottles as there are few places to replenish water supplies when crossing the Kugti Pass.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 4 Chamba, Dhaula Dhar Passes, Pangi Valley & Western Lahaul*. Also refer to the US Military U502 series 1:250,000, *NI 43-16 ref Palampur*.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

From Brahmaur, there are shared taxis via Hadsar to Kugti village (Rs 70, two hours). Once the road has been fully completed there will also be a regular bus service to Kugti.

Buses from Udaipur (Lahaul) stop at Jelma en route to Keylong (Rs 40, two hours, three per day). Alternatively you may get a seat in one of the many trucks going directly to Manali (Rs 150, eight hours). If you are fortunate you could complete the final stage of the trek and be back in Manali that evening.

THE TREK

Day 1: Kugti Village to Duggi Got

4–5 hours, 15km

The trail winds up to the revered Kailang temple before ascending through cedar forest to the beautiful alpine meadow at Duggi Got. The alpine meadow is carpeted with wildflowers from July to September and there is a profusion of aster, gentians, primula, euphorbia, delphinium, anemone, potentilla, saxifrage and many other plants that could keep a botanist occupied for days.

There is a campsite alongside the Budhil River about 2km before Kugti. The campsite is also ideally located if descending directly from the Mani Mahesh kora; alternatively stay at the **Forest Rest House** (d Rs 400) overlooking Kugti village.

From **Kugti** village (2640m) ascend the outlying fields and meadow leading up the Budhil Valley. After 2km the trail splits. Follow the upper trail and commence the ascent (steep in places) to Kailang Temple. This stage should take around two hours.

Kailang Temple (3050m) is steeped in local Gaddi tradition. Inside the main temple is a statue of Kartik (son of Vishnu and Shiva). There are also Naga statues in deference to Kailong Nag – a benevolent serpent said to ensure the safety of the flocks of sheep and goats that pass this way each season.

From the temple, the trail winds through cedar and dwarf rhododendron. Small stands of silver birch are also seen on the hills en route to the extensive meadows known as **Duggi Got** (3100m).

Day 2: Duggi Got to Alyas

4–5 hours, 14km

This trek is to the base of the peaks and glaciers that form the impressive Pir Panjal. The camp at Alyas is further enhanced by the presence of Gaddi shepherds in late June during their spring migration, as well as in late August and early September as they lead their huge flocks of sheep and goats from their summer grazing areas in Lahaul back down to Brahmaur and the Ravi Valley.

From Duggi Got follow the well-defined shepherds' trail across a boulder field. There is a huge rock overhang 2km beyond the side river known as Duggi Cave (3200m), a popular shelter for Gaddi shepherds during their spring migration.

The trail ascends the true right of the river across meadows where cattle from Kugti village graze in summer. The trail splits 3km beyond Duggi Cave. The lower trail heads straight up the valley. Follow the higher trail, which winds up the pastures to a side valley to the north. Another ascent, steep in places, leads to a grassy plateau known as **Alyas** (4100m).

There are a couple of Gaddi shepherds, huts (not always unoccupied) in the meadow and many campsites. Camp here or continue for 1km towards the terminal moraine at the base of the pass (4100m). With binoculars, it is possible to identify the cairns on top of Kugti Pass.

Day 3: Alyas to Kadlu via Kugti Pass

8–9 hours, 18km

This is a challenging stage and a fitting reminder that there are no easy traverses of the Pir Panjal in the upper Ravi Valley. The climb to the pass has its rewards including magnificent views back down and across to Mani Mahesh Kalias and the high ridges and glaciers that form the Dhaula Dhar. To the north are the unmistakable peaks of the Himalaya Range set high above the more stark valleys of Lahaul.

From **Alyas**, ascend the terminal moraine field along a trail that heads to the true left of the glacial stream. The trail through boulders and scree is marked by rock cairns, reaching a plateau (4500m) at the snout of the glacier flowing from below the pass.

The route heads west and ascends a ridgeline (4800m). After reaching a substantial cairn, the route heads across a broad rock band between the ridge and the pass. Take care with hand and foot holds, particularly in the early morning when the rocks are icy. Be sure not to miss the cairns that lead around to a point just above the pass. The route then winds down to the tridents and cairns that mark the **Kugti Pass** (5040m). The time from camp to the pass is around five hours.

The route drops to a lower pass before heading west across an extensive scree slope, under snow until July. The trail winds high above the glacial floor, leading to the true left of the glacier before gradually descending for 3km to 4km to the lateral moraine on the main glacier. Trek towards the centre of the glacier before veering to the true left across the extensive glacial moraine.

Follow the trail down the scree slope towards the meadow of **Kadlu** (3720m). Cross the braided river flowing from the snout of the glacier to a campsite marked by Gaddi flags and tridents. The time from the pass to camp is around four hours.

Day 4: Kadlu to Jelma

3 hours, 10km

The descent to the Chenab Valley can be completed in the cool of the morning although time should be reserved to appreciate some of the farming villages in this relatively isolated region of Lahaul.

The trail from Kadlu is nothing more than a goat track as it descends across **scree slopes** on the true right of the valley. After 5km the trail crosses the river over an improvised bridge before following the course of an irrigation channel to the outlying fields of the village of **Rape** (3000m). Descend further to the bridge over the **Chenab River** and complete the short ascent to the trailhead and the nearby village of **Jelma** (2850m).

MORE TREKS

Deo Tibba Base

3 days, 45km, easy–moderate

While dam construction in the lower Jagatsukh Valley is underway there are still many possibilities to savour the alpine meadows and mountain views including **Deo Tibba** (6001m) in the upper reaches of the valley. From Jagatsukh (1850m) follow the road built for the dam construction to the village of **Khanol** (2280m) before a tough 600m climb to the Gujar encampment at **Chikha** (3100m). On Day 2 the trail leads across flowered meadows to the Gaddi shepherd camp at **Serai** (3900m) with a backdrop of hanging glaciers beneath the summit of Deo Tibba. An additional day is recommended to trek higher and gain further views of the vast glaciers and snowfields that define the Pir Panjal. There are also demanding options from Serai over the **Goru Pass** (4600m) to the upper Malana Valley, Dadru and Malana village. On Day 3 the return trek to Jagatsukh can be completed in a long day. There are regular buses to/from Manali and Jagatsukh (Rs 10, one hour).

Kinnaur Kailas Circuit

3 days, 47km, demanding

Complete the high-altitude trek around the sacred peak of **Kinnaur Kailas** (6050m). The trek takes a minimum of three days although it is essential to acclimatise, and a day or more at the prosperous village of

Charang is recommended before tackling the Charang La.

Road developments have now extended up the Charang Valley to the village of **Lambar** (2930m) from where it is a short stage to the camp at **Tshruling** (3370m). From here there is an optional trek to the Buddhist settlement of **Charang** (3500m) and its ancient gompa 2km above the village. From Tshruling there is a gradual haul on Day 2 to the alpine pastures at **Lalanti** (4200m). The third and final day is challenging plus. Set out early for the eight- to 10-hour day. First is through boulders and moraine to the base (4700m) of the Charang La in a spectacular setting beneath the peaks and hanging glaciers of the **Kinnaur Kailas Range**. The 500m climb to the pass is steep and under snow until the middle of July. Just below the pass there is also a tricky traverse to the **flags**, **tridents** and **cairns** that mark the **Charang La** (5280m), with views across the Kinnaur Kailas Range and the peaks of the Dhaula Dhar to the south. It's a 1700m descent to the Sangla Valley and Chitkul (3450m), although if the day is too tiring there is a small campsite (4200m) on the way down.

To reach Lambar there are shared 4WD vehicles from the district headquarters of Kinnaur at Rekong Peo or else take the bus (three hours) to Thangi village and truck it from there. From Chitkul there is a daily bus to Sangla and you can return to Rekong Peo or take onward buses to Shimla.

Inner Line permits are required to complete the trek. These can be obtained in Shimla or Rekong Peo and will need to be shown at the ITBP checkposts at Thangi, Tshruling and Charang.

TOWNS & FACILITIES

BRAHMAUR

☎ 01895 / alt 2195m / pop 2600

The town of Brahmaur is located high above the Ravi River. It is renowned for its well-preserved Hindu temples, while the dramatic backdrop of the Dhaula Dhar and Pir Panjal leave little doubt that you are in a spectacular corner of the Himalaya. Brahmaur is also the departure point for many thousands of pilgrims who make the annual trek to Mani Mahesh Kailas.

Information

The **Regional Directorate of Mountaineering** (☎ 225036), on the track just above the taxi stand is the best bet for up-to-date information and for organising guides and porters. There are internet outlets where STD and ISD calls can also be made in Brahmaur; however, there are no facilities for changing money. It is therefore necessary to change money either in Pathankot or McLeod Ganj.

Supplies & Equipment

Fresh fruit and vegetables are available, along with a limited assortment of tinned food. Nuts, raisins and other luxuries should be purchased from Chamba or McLeod Ganj. Supplies are limited beyond Brahmaur, except during the peak periods of the Mani Mahesh pilgrimage.

Equipment such as cooking stoves, pots and pans can be purchased in the bazaar. Quality camping gear such as sleeping bags, tents and insulated mats are not available for hire.

Trekking Agents

Arrangements can be made through **Himalayan Travel Agency** (☎ 225059; near HP Coop Bank) or **Mani Mahesh Travels** (☎ 222507; manimaheshtravels@yahoo.com; Chamba)

An alternative to these is to make arrangements through one of the agents in McLeod Ganj (see p140). Budget for around Rs 1200 per day for the Mani Mahesh trek and Rs 2000 for treks over the Pir Panjal to Lahaul. If making your own arrangements, you can hire porters in Hadsar. Budget for around Rs 250 per porter per day, plus transport, accommodation and relocation allowance.

Eating & Sleeping

During the pilgrimage season in August, accommodation is at a premium. **Chaurasi Hotel** (☎ 225615; r Rs 400-600) is recommended. There is also the **Chamunda Guesthouse** (☎ 225056; r Rs 200) and **Sona Sapan Guesthouse** (☎ 225337; r Rs 200-250).

The guesthouses can provide basic Indian dishes, while there is an assortment of *dhabas* near the bus station.

Getting There & Away

There are regular bus services to Chamba (Rs 50, every two hours from 5.30am to 5.30pm). From Chamba, onward buses depart every hour to Pathankot (Rs 75, five hours). There is a direct overnight service to Dharamsala (Rs 250, 10 hours) departing Brahmaur at 5.30pm.

MANALI

☎ 01902 / alt 2050m / pop 4400

The thriving town of Manali has always been an important trading centre linking the upper sections of the Kullu Valley with the rarefied heights of Lahaul and the Indus Valley. For some, Manali is a resting point before undertaking the two-day drive to Leh and Ladakh. For trekkers, the trails out of the Kullu Valley present no end of possibilities that could keep them engaged for weeks at a time.

Information

Bookworm (NAC market) has a commendable selection of books and local guides on the Himalaya. For reliable trekking information, contact the **Directorate of Mountaineering** (250337, 253789; www.dmas.gov.in; 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, closed 2nd Sat of each month) at Aleo, about 3km south of Manali on the east bank of the Beas. The internet service in Manali is quick and reliable, while there are no shortage of outlets to make STD and ISD calls, even in the remoter villages before or after the trek. There are ATMs at the State Bank of India and the Punjab National Bank and there are outlets providing foreign-exchange and cash-advance facilities. It is advisable to change funds here as it may be difficult to change money in Lahaul or Spiti at the end of a trek.

Supplies & Equipment

There is a wide variety of fresh and tinned food in Manali. If trekking out of Jagatsukh (on the Jagatsukh to Hampta Pass & Lahaul trek) or from Naggar (on the Chandrakani Pass & Malana trek) bring supplies from Manali. For the Pin Parvati Pass & Spiti trek, supplies can be purchased at Manikaran.

Trekking agents sometimes hire quality camping gear (such as sleeping bags, tents and insulated mats) to clients. If in doubt, bring your own gear. Cooking equipment such as stoves, pots and pans are available at local markets.

Trekking Agents

Of the many agents in Manali, here are some of those recommended: **Above 14000ft** (☎ 232281; www.above14000ft.com; Log Huts Area); **Antrek Tours** (☎ 252292; www.antrek.co.in/; 1 Rambagh, the Mall); **Himalayan Adventures** (☎ 253050; www.himalayanadventurersindia.com; The Mall); **Himalayan Journeys** (☎ 252365; www.himalayanjourneysindia.com, The Mall opposite Nehru Park) and **Tiger Eye Adventures** (☎ 252718; www.tigereyeadventure.com; Old Manali Rd, Old Manali).

Most agencies offer trekking packages for around Rs 2000 per day per person for small groups. Discounts are usually available for groups of five or more.

Alternatively, the agents can organise porters or horse handlers. The rate for porters is about Rs 300 per day, plus a clothing, travel and location allowance. The Tourist Office sets the rates for packhorses each season. Budget for around Rs 250 per horse per day, with some discount if hiring more than five horses.

If you are making your own arrangements, it is also useful to check out the information boards at Chopsticks and Mount View restaurants in Manali.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotels include **Sunshine Guest House** (☎ 252320; d Rs 400-600) and **Hotel Pinewood** (☎ 250118; d from Rs 800).

Most trekkers, however, head to the more tranquil climes of Old Manali where there is no shortage of budget accommodation including **Apple View Guest House** (☎ 253899; r with shared bathroom from Rs 200) and **Tourist Nest** (☎ 252383; d from Rs 250).

There is a wide range of restaurants including Mount View and Chopsticks close to the Mall while Johnson's Cafe, uphill from the Mall, is set in a pleasant garden and is a good place to share a beer and perhaps a story or two gathered on the trek.

Getting There & Away

The nearest airport is Bhuntar, 52km south of Manali and 10km south of Kullu. There are daily flights to Delhi with **Kingfisher** (www.flykingfisher.com) and **MDLR** (www.mdlrairlines.com) for Rs 10,384. You can book seats through one of the recognised travel agents. A taxi from Manali to Bhuntar costs Rs 1000 (two hours).

The bus station has a **booth** (☎ 252323; 5am–7pm) for advance bookings. Luxury buses are run by the **Himachal Pradesh Tourist Development Corporation** (HPTDC; ☎ 252116) and the **Manali Luxury Coach Owners Association** (☎ 253816).

The HPTDC buses to Delhi leave at 5pm (semi/deluxe Rs 705/940, 12 to 14 hours). Book at the HPTDC booking office. Private buses can also be booked through local travel agencies. Buses to Leh run from June until October depending on when the Manali to Leh highway is clear of snow. The HPTDC buses cost Rs 1600 (including tented accommodation in Keylong) and leave at 11am; ordinary government buses (Rs 525) also leave at 11am but do not include overnight accommodation. Private buses also run, and charge around Rs 1000 stopping at either Keylong or Sarchu. Alternatively book a seat in a taxi Rs 1500 to Rs 2000 through one of the travel agents. The buses to Lahaul and Spiti operate from June until October. Several buses operate each day to Keylong (Rs 109, six hours), while buses to Kaza depart at 6am (Rs 152, 10 hours). There are overnight buses to Dharamsala/McLeod Ganj with ordinary/deluxe services costing Rs 250/450.

Regular public buses run to/from Jagatsukh (Rs 10), Naggar (Rs 15), Manikaran (Rs 38) and the various other trekking-off points.

Taxis are a convenient alternative if you have plenty of gear. Prices and details are included in the Planning section for each trek.

MCLEOD GANJ

☎ 01892 / alt 1980m

McLeod Ganj was originally established as a British garrison in the 1850s before being gradually developed as a hill station and an attractive alternative to Dharamsala. However, it wasn't until the 14th Dalai Lama and his exiled government settled here, together with many Tibetan refugees, that a steady flow of trekkers and travellers started to visit this delightful region.

Information

Bookworm (Hotel Bhagshu Rd) is the best all-round bookshop, while the **Namgyal Bookshop** (Tsuglagkhang Complex) stocks a range of books on Buddhism. The **Regional Mountaineering Centre** (☎ 221787; Dharamkot Rd; closed Sun) has maps. Copies of *Treks & Passes of the Dhaula Dhar & the Pir Panjal* by SR Sani, the former centre director, are also available at some of the trekking agents. There are many internet cafes and no shortage of places to make STD and ISD calls. You can also get a mobile signal on most stages of the trek. There is only one ATM, at the **State Bank of India** (Temple Rd), that is prone to breakdowns, however, there are many outlets offering foreign exchange and cash advances.

Supplies & Equipment

You can buy all the food you will need in McLeod Ganj. Cooking stoves, pots and pans can be purchased in the bazaar. Quality camping gear is generally not available and, even if undertaking an inclusive trek with one of the local agents, it is worth bringing your own sleeping bag.

Trekking Agents

There are many trekking agents, namely **Eagle Height Trekkers** (☎ 221079; www.123himachal.com; Mall Rd); **Highland Trekkers** (☎ 221740; hltrekkers@hotmail.com; Mall Rd) and **Yeti Travels** (☎ 221060; Dharamkot Rd).

Inclusive treks cost Rs 1200 to Rs 1600 per person per day.

Agents can also organise mules (Rs 300 per day), and porters for the Indrahar pass for Rs 250, plus guides from Rs 400.

Sleeping & Eating

There is a wide range of accommodation, including **Hotel Tibet** (☎ 221587; htdshala@sancharnet.in; Bhagshu Rd; r from Rs 500) and the nearby **Green Hotel** (☎ 221200; Bhagshu Rd; r from Rs 350). Also recommended is the **Pema Thang Guest House** (☎ 221871; www.pemathang.net; Hotel Bhagshu Rd; r from Rs 900).

There are many eating places including the McLlo Restaurant, near the bus station and Hotel Tibet while it would be hard to beat the coffee at Coffee Talk on Temple Rd.

Getting There & Away

Kingfisher Airlines (www.flykingfisher.com) operates daily flights from Gaggal to Delhi (Rs 7829). Bookings can be made from one of the travel agents in McLeod Ganj. A taxi to Gaggal, 15km south of Dharamsala, costs Rs 800.

The new bus stand just below the junction of Temple Rd and the Mall will help to ease the traffic congestion. To Delhi, you can book seats from the bus stand on the Himachal Roadways Transport Corporation (HRTC) buses. They depart at 6pm (deluxe /super deluxe Rs 450/840, 12 hours). There are also private buses that can be booked through travel agents (deluxe/super deluxe Rs 680/900). HRTC buses and private buses (ordinary/deluxe Rs 250/450, eight hours overnight) run to Manali. HRTC buses (Rs 250. eight hours) run to Chamba and continue on to Brahmaur (Rs 300, extra two hours). To Pathankot, HRTC buses run throughout the day (Rs 75, four hours)

Railway bookings can be made by most travel agencies, who have an online connection to the Indian Railways reservation system. A service fee of Rs 100 is normally charged.

Prices and details of local bus services and taxis are included in the Planning section of each trek.

Uttarakhand

HIGHLIGHTS

- Follow pilgrim trails to the sacred **source of the Ganges** (p160)
- View the distinctive twin peaks of Nanda Devi – the highest mountain in India – while ascending to the **Kuari Pass** (p167)
- Visit villages out of **Munsyari** (p177) from where the legendry Pundits were recruited in the 19th century for exploration in nearby Tibet
- Ascend trails through pristine bamboo, rhododendron, oak and conifer forest to the mysterious lake of **Rup Kund** (p171)
- Spend time in the **Valley of the Flowers** (p167) or trekking to high-altitude meadows renowned for their wildflowers

Seasoned trekkers will testify that the Himalaya Range of Uttarakhand offers many spectacular opportunities. These include Nanda Devi, the highest peak within India, and a host of other 7000m peaks that stretch to the borderlands of Tibet and western Nepal.

For the pilgrim, Uttarakhand is revered as the true 'Abode of the Gods'. The main source of the Ganges flows from these mountains giving rise to the Char Dham – the pilgrimage undertaken by thousands of Hindu devotees each year to Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath. Gangotri is recognised as the actual source of the Ganges, though the stream emerges from the snout of an impressive glacier at nearby Gaumukh. Yamunotri is the source of the Yamuna River, a main tributary of the Ganges. Kedarnath is recognised as one of the divine resting places of Lord Shiva, while Badrinath is assigned to Vishnu. Then there is Hem Kund, revered by Sikh pilgrims, and the nearby Valley of the Flowers.

Yet for some inexplicable reason, Uttarakhand attracts only a handful of trekkers each season, making it one of the best-kept secrets in the Himalaya.

North of the hill resort of Mussoorie are trails to the beautiful meadow of Har ki Dun. For more challenging options there are forays over the Rupin Pass to Kinnaur. From the ancient pilgrim centre of Uttarkashi there are trails to the serene waters of Dodi Tal.

Treks in the vicinity of Nanda Devi will surpass expectations. Ascend the Kuari Pass to peer into the magnificent Nanda Devi Sanctuary or undertake the classic trek to the Pindari Glacier.

HISTORY

Uttarakhand's formidable terrain, characterised by deep gorges and high mountains, was conducive to the establishment of small kingdoms separated by well-defined mountain ridges. Many kingdoms maintained their independence by establishing a *garh* (fortress), a strategic position from which to protect themselves against their neighbours and invading armies from the plains of northwest India. The terrain was gradually divided into two regions: Garhwal to the west, as far as the Tons River; and Kumaon to the east, extending to the Kali River and the present-day border of India and Nepal.

Until the year 2000, the Garhwal and Kumaon formed part of the state of Uttar Pradesh. However as a result of increasing agitation throughout the hill regions, Uttaranchal became a separate hill state in 2000 with its administrative headquarters at Dehra Dun. In 2007, the state was officially renamed Uttarakhand, a traditional name meaning 'northern country'. Its main languages are Hindi, Garhwali and Kumaoni.

ENVIRONMENT

Unlike other regions in the West Himalaya there are no intermediary ranges between the Indian Plains and the main Himalayan Range. The foothills of the Siwalik hills give way to rugged gorge country formed as the tributaries of the Ganges forge a course to the northern Gangetic Plain.

The Himalaya Range includes many impressive peaks including Nanda Devi (7816m). North of the Himalaya is the Zanskar Range. It is the range that defines the border between Uttarakhand and Tibet. It is characterised by 7000m peaks that extend to the Kali River and the western border of Nepal.

Refer to the Flora & Fauna boxed text (p150) for an overview of the wildlife and birds in the region.

CLIMATE

With the exception of the remote valleys north of the Himalaya Range, Uttarakhand is subject to the heavy monsoon rains.

The pre-monsoon months are May and June, with monsoon rains falling by the first week of July. By mid-September, the settled, post-monsoon conditions return.

Winter snows start to fall by late October. This also marks the end of the pilgrimage season. Heavy snowfalls on the Himalaya Range preclude any thoughts of trekking during winter. In early May snows melt sufficiently to reopen the main trails into the mountains.

South of the Himalaya Range some of the valleys, including the Har ki Dun, enjoy milder climates. At lower altitudes the snowfall is not so heavy and the trails between the villages are passable even during winter.

PLANNING

When to Trek

There are two distinct trekking seasons: pre-monsoon (May and June) and post-monsoon (mid-September to October). The start of the pre-monsoon season is dependent on the spring snowmelt, although you may encounter snow on the high passes well into July. During this period, expect day temperatures to rise to 20°C, although they can still fall well below freezing during an occasional storm.

In July and August the monsoon rain does not fall incessantly and if well prepared you can still undertake a trek. Day temperatures rise to the mid-20s (Celsius). However, expect delays getting to and from the trailhead, as landslides blocking the highways are a regular feature.

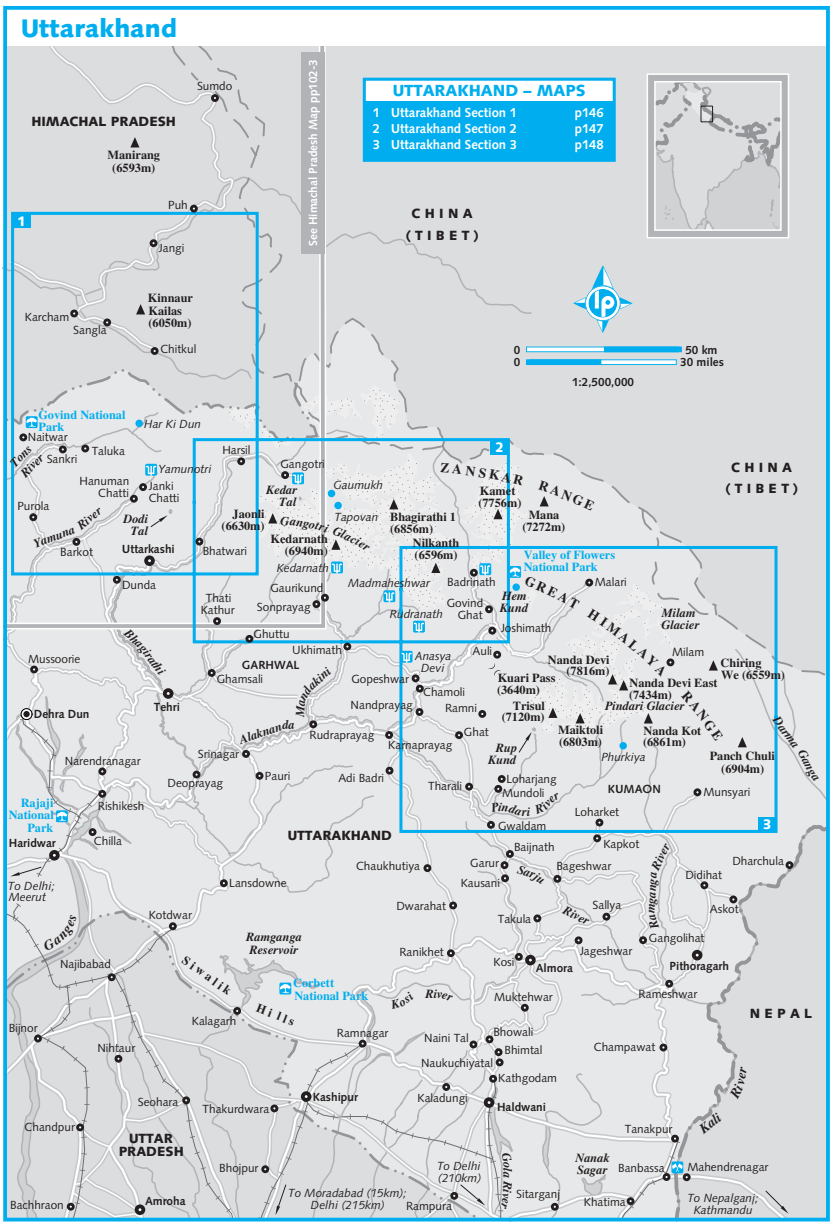
Maps

The Leomann 1:200,000 series and US Military U502 1:250,000 series are useful for planning as well as trekking. The Ground Survey of India trekking map series are also available from the Uttarakhand Tourist Office (p213) in Delhi. See Planning for each trek for specific map requirements.

The detailed aerial survey *Garhwal Himalaya* is published by the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research (SFAR). There are two sections, east and west, based on the Survey of India maps and drawn by Ernst Huber at a scale of 1:150,000.

Books

For an introduction to the possibilities of trekking in Uttarakhand go no further than *The Nanda Devi Affair & Mountain Delight* by Bill Aitkin. Also refer to *Beautiful Garhwal* by Ruskin Bond and *Garhwal*


Uttarakhand
UTTARAKHAND – MAPS
1 Uttarakhand Section 1 p146
2 Uttarakhand Section 2 p147
3 Uttarakhand Section 3 p148
See Himachal Pradesh Map pp102-3
HIMACHAL PRADESH
CHINA (TIBET)
NEPAL
UTTAR PRADESH
UTTARAKHAND
Sumdo
Manirang (6593m)
Puh
Jangi
Kinnaur Kailas (6050m)
Karcham
Sangla
Chitkul
Govind National Park
Har Ki Dun
Naitwar
Sankri
Taluka
Tons River
Harsil
Yamunotri
Gangotri
Kedar Tal
Gaumukh
Tapovan
Bhagirathi I (6856m)
Kamet (7756m)
Mana (7272m)
ZANSKAR RANGE
Hanuman Chatti
Janki Chatti
Purola
Jaonli (6630m)
Dodi Tal
Yamuna River
Barkot
Uttarkashi
Bhatwari
Gangotri Glacier
Kedarnath (6940m)
Kedarnath
Nilkanth (6596m)
Madhmaheshwar
Badrinath
Valley of Flowers National Park
Hem Kund
Govind Ghat
Joshimath
Malari
GREAT HIMALAYA RANGE
Milam Glacier
Milam
Chiring We (6559m)
Dunda
Gaurikund
Sonprayag
Thati Kathur
Rudranath
Ghuttu
Ukhimath
Auli
Anasya Devi
Nanda Devi (7816m)
Kuari Pass (3640m)
Nanda Devi East (7434m)
Pindari Glacier
Mussoorie
GARHWAL
Ghamsali
Bhagirathi
Mandakini
Gopeshwar
Chamoli
Trisul (7120m)
Maiktoli (6803m)
Nanda Kot (6861m)
Phurkiya
Panch Chuli (6904m)
Dehra Dun
Tehri
Nandprayag
Ramni
Alaknanda
Rudraprayag
Karnaprayag
Ghat
Rup Kund
Dhauli Ganga
Narendranagar
Srinagar
Deoprayag
Pauri
Adi Badri
Tharali
Loharjang
Mundoli
Pindari River
KUMAON
Munsyari
Rajaji National Park
Rishikesh
Haridwar
Chilla
Loharket
Gwaldam
Baijnath
Kapkot
To Delhi; Meerut
Lansdowne
Chaukhutiya
Garur
Bageshwar
Gomti
Kausani
Ramganga River
Didihat
Dharchula
Kotdwar
Ganges
Dwarahat
Takula
Sallya
River
Askot
Ramganga Reservoir
Ranikhet
Kosi
Almora
Jageshwar
Gangolihat
Pithoragarh
Najibabad
Siwalik Hills
Corbett National Park
Kosi River
Muktehwar
Rameshwar
Kalagarh
Bijnor
Nihtaur
Ramnagar
Naini Tal
Bhowali
Bhimtal
Champawat
Naukuchiyatal
Kathgodam
Seohara
Thakurdwara
Kashipur
Kaladungi
Haldwani
Chandpur
Tanakpur
Kali River
Bhojpur
To Delhi (210km)
Ganga Canal
Nanak Sagar
Banbassa
Mahendranagar
Bachhraon
Amroha
To Moradabad (15km); Delhi (215km)
Rampura
Sitarganj
Khatima
To Nepalganj; Kathmandu
0 50 km
0 30 miles
1:2,500,000

Himalaya by Gurmeet and Elizabeth Thukral. *Sacred Waters* by Stephen Alter is a gem that captures the essence of pilgrimages to the sacred sources of the Ganges. For classic accounts of exploration in the 1930s read *Nanda Devi* by Eric Shipton, included in Eric Shipton – The Six Mountain- Travel Books, *The Ascent of Nanda Devi* by HW Tilman, included in HW Tilman – The Seven Mountain-Travel Books and *The Valley of Flowers* by Frank Smythe. For an overview of climbing and trekking possibilities get *Peaks and passes of the Garhwal Himalaya* by Harish Kapadia.

Permits & Regulations

Permits are needed for the Source of the Ganges trek, Kuari Pass, Rup Kund and the Milam Glacier & Nanda Devi treks. Apart from that there no permits needed or special regulations to observe for treks in this chapter. As always, carry your passport and do not go near to the Inner Line borders close to the Tibet border.

GARHWAL

Many inter-war British travellers and mountaineers described the Garhwal as the most beautiful region of the Himalaya. While these observations were made at a time when Nepal had not opened its borders to foreigners, there would be few who would deny the attractions of trekking in the Garhwal. The alpine trails leading through flowered meadows and traditional Hindu villages together with the views of Nanda Devi and a host of 7000m peaks provide many opportunities. A trek along the ancient pilgrim trails to the source of the Ganges adds a further dimension to the possibilities in the region.

Treks in the Garhwal are from the hill station of Mussoorie or the pilgrim towns of Rishikesh, Uttarkashi and Joshimath.

HISTORY

In the early 16th century, the powerful Panwar dynasty united many of the independent hill kingdoms to form the Garhwal. In 1517 it established its capital at Srinagar, where it administered an impressive area, including much of the terrain extending from the Yamuna River to Nanda Devi.

During the time of the Moghuls, the various rajahs paid tribute to the Moghul court. However, it was a flexible arrangement, with the Moghul emperors having little desire to establish absolute rule over the vast mountain region.

In 1790 the Gurkhas attacked, as a part of their ambitious plan to form a Himalayan kingdom as far as the Sutlej River. This attracted the attention of the British East India Company, which was wary of the Gurkhas and the Sikhs joining forces to form a vast trans-Himalayan empire. The British wanted to maintain a neutral Himalayan territory between the two powers to protect their trade with Tibet. When the local rajahs asked the British to intervene, the East India army fought a number of wars with the Gurkhas, which resulted in the Treaty of Siliguri in 1817. This treaty brought Nepal's western borders back to the Kali River.

Following the Treaty, the British ruled Dehra Dun and the eastern districts of Garhwal. The western region was restored to the local rajah, Sadarshan Shah, who established his capital at Tehri (known as Tehri Garhwal).

Hill stations were built to accommodate the British officials, notably at Mussoorie. The British districts in the Garhwal were initially administered by the Residency of Bengal before becoming part of the North-west Frontier Province, and finally part of the United Provinces. In 1947, after India's independence, the region became part of the state of Uttar Pradesh, while the ruler of the Tehri Garhwal, Maharajah Manvedra Shah, merged his kingdom with Uttar Pradesh on 1 May 1949.

Further administrative developments in 1968 ensured that Chamoli, Dehra Dun, Pauri Garhwal, Tehri Garhwal and Uttarkashi were administered from Pauri. A line running northeast from the town of Gwaldam up the Pindari Valley and along the east ridge of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary is the accepted division between Garhwal and Kumaon.

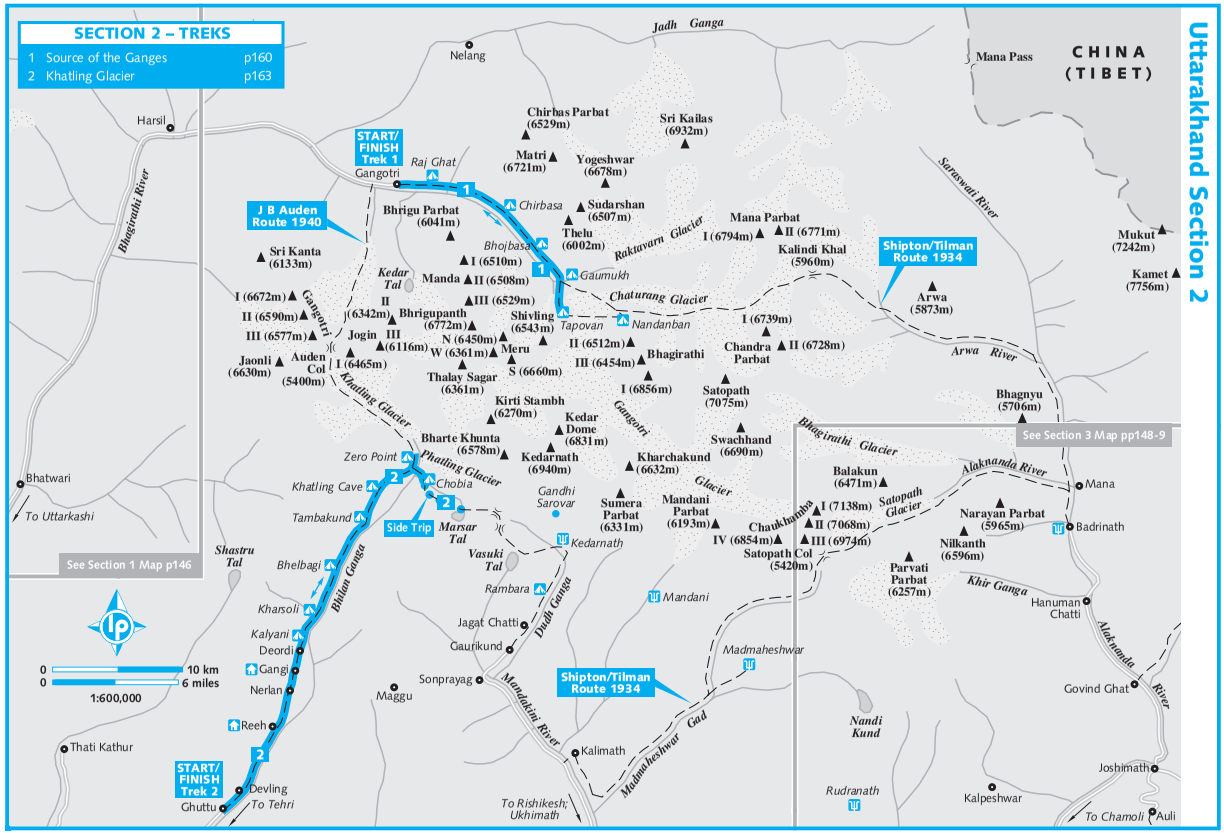
ENVIRONMENT

The Himalaya Range forms the backbone of the Garhwal region. In western Garhwal, it includes the Swargarohini Range, (sometimes regarded as an extension of the

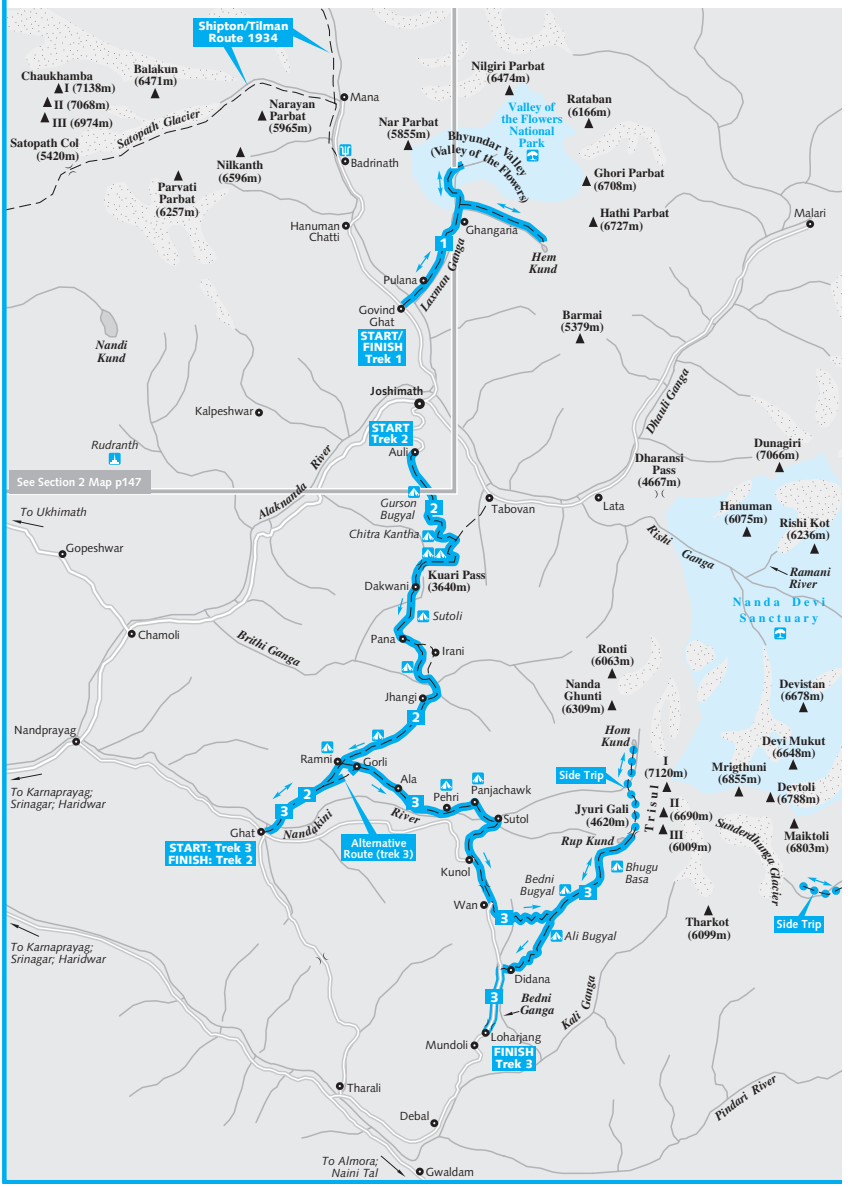
Uttarakhand Section 1

SECTION 1 – TREKS

1	Rupin Pass & Kinnaur	p151
2	Har Ki Dun & Ruinsara Lake	p154
3	Dodi Tal & Yamunotri	p157


Uttarakhand Section 2
SECTION 2 – TREKS
1 Source of the Ganges p160
2 Khatling Glacier p163
CHINA (TIBET)
Mana Pass
Jadh Ganga
Nelang
Harsil
Bhagirathi River
START/ FINISH Trek 1
Gangotri
Raj Ghat
Chirbas Parbat (6529m)
Sri Kailas (6932m)
Matri (6721m)
Yogeshwar (6678m)
J B Auden Route 1940
Bhrigu Parbat (6041m)
Chirbasa
Sudarshan (6507m)
Thelu (6002m)
Bhojbasa
Raktavarn Glacier
Mana Parbat I (6794m) II (6771m)
Kalindi Khal (5960m)
Shipton/Tilman Route 1934
Saraswati River
Mukut (7242m)
Kamet (7756m)
Sri Kanta (6133m)
Kedar Tal
Manda I (6510m) II (6508m) III (6529m)
Gaumukh
Chaturang Glacier
Arwa (5873m)
I (6672m) II (6590m) III (6577m)
Gangotri
II (6342m)
Bhrigupanth (6772m)
Shivling (6543m)
Tapovan
Nandanban
I (6739m)
Jogin I (6116m) II (6465m) III
N (6450m) W (6361m)
Meru
II (6512m)
III (6454m)
Bhagirathi
Chandra Parbat II (6728m)
Arwa River
Jaonli (6630m)
Auden Col (5400m)
Thalay Sagar (6361m)
S (6660m)
I (6856m)
Satopath (7075m)
Bhagnyu (5706m)
Khatling Glacier
Kirti Stambh (6270m)
Kedar Dome (6831m)
Gangotri
Bharte Khunta (6578m)
Kedarnath (6940m)
Kharchakund (6632m)
Swachhand (6690m)
See Section 3 Map pp148-9
Bhagirathi Glacier
Zero Point
Phatling Glacier
Chobia
Khatling Cave
Gandhi Sarovar
Glacier
Balakun (6471m)
Alaknanda River
Bhatwari
To Uttarkashi
Tambakund
Side Trip
Marsar Tal
Sumera Parbat (6331m)
Mandani Parbat (6193m)
Chaukhamba I (7138m) II (7068m) III (6974m) IV (6854m)
Satopath Glacier
Satopath Col (5420m)
Mana
Narayan Parbat (5965m)
Badrinath
Nilkanth (6596m)
Shastru Tal
Vasuki Tal
Kedarnath
Parvati Parbat (6257m)
Khir Ganga
Bhelbagi
Bhilan Ganga
Rambara
Dudh Ganga
Mandani
Hanuman Chatti
Alaknanda River
Kharsoli
Kalyani
Deordi
Jagat Chatti
Gaurikund
Madmaheshwar
Govind Ghat
Gangi
Nerlan
Sonprayag
Maggu
Mandakini River
Shipton/Tilman Route 1934
Madmaheshwar Gad
Nandi Kund
Reeh
Thati Kathur
Kalimath
Joshimath
START/ FINISH Trek 2
Devling
Ghuttu
To Tehri
To Rishikesh; Ukhimath
Rudranath
Kalpeshwar
To Chamoli
Auli
See Section 1 Map p146
0 10 km
0 6 miles
1:600,000

Uttarakhand Section 3



Uttarakhand Section 3

FLORA & FAUNA

Although the subtropical forest in the Corbett National Park is renowned for its tigers, the highest recorded sighting was at around 3200m in the Garhwal! **Forest leopards** are found in the lower temperate forests throughout Uttarakhand. However, there are no contemporary records to compare with the famous man-eater of Rudraprayag that killed 125 people before being shot by Jim Corbett in May 1926.

Serow and **goral** are found in the upper elevations of the temperate forests, where **musk deer** may also be spotted. To provide safer breeding grounds for these endangered species, a number of sanctuaries have been established, including one near Kedarnath. **Brown bear** are found in the caves and ledges above the high alpine slopes, while **black bear** are sighted at lower elevations in summer, close to the village cornfields.

Bharal and **ibex** are restricted to the high alpine pastures. Mountaineers and trekkers in the Nanda Devi Sanctuary in the 1970s were taken aback by the tame *bharal*, while there were frequent sightings of **snow leopards**. Nowadays the **ibex** and *bharal* are confined to remote regions such as the Govind National Park, the alpine meadows beneath the Khatling Glacier and the upper reaches of the Milam Valley.

As with Himachal Pradesh, the huge geographic contrast favours a wide variety of species. Birds of prey include **golden eagles**, **lammergeiers** and **Steppe eagles**. **Sparrowhawks** are also seen swooping on small birds at lower altitudes. **Koklass and kalij pheasants** are regularly seen in the forested regions bordering the alpine pastures, as are **cheer pheasants** and the impressive **satyr tragopan**. In the mixed forest, expect to see the distinctive **white-capped water redstart**, **blue whistling thrush**, **leaf warblers**, **yellow-breasted greenfinches**, **Himalayan and scaly-bellied woodpeckers**, **white-tailed nuthatch** and **spotted forktails**. **Eurasian and black-headed jays** are found at lower altitudes, as are **kingfishers**, **black-throated tits**, **flycatchers**, **Himalayan woodpeckers**, **Indian and Drongo cuckoos**, **barn swallows** and **winter wrens**.

Extensive chir forests extend from 1500m to 2300m across the many hill regions. Above the **chir pine** are temperate forests of **horse chestnut**, **yew** and **sycamore**, which give way to **blue pine**, **bamboo** and **rhododendron**. **Birch groves** are found in the upper regions to the west of the state. To appreciate the striking relationship between vegetation and elevation, consider the trek days from Bedni Bugyal down to the village of Loharjang (Rup Kund trek, p171) or from the alpine meadows of Har ki Dun to the trailhead at Taluka (Har ki Dun Valley & Ruinsara Lake trek, p156). Both can be completed in a day.

This region offers an exceptional range of wildflowers. The Bhyundar Valley's Valley of the Flowers is the most famous location but there are many other areas of interest. Any high alpine meadow in Uttarakhand is worth visiting during the monsoon. Earlier in the season the wildflowers are particularly attractive in the Har ki Dun Valley.

Dhaula Dhar) and the Bandarpunch Range, which forms the main divide between the headwaters of the Yamuna and Bhagirathi Rivers.

The Himalaya Range extends to the Gangotri region, where a huge concentration of peaks almost encloses the Gangotri Glacier. At the head of the glacier, the Chaukhamba Range provides an impressive divide between the headwaters of the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda Rivers, while the peaks in the vicinity of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary further define the Himalaya Range.

Wildlife sightings are becoming increasingly rare outside the national parks and sanctuaries. However, this region is home to black bears, forest leopards, serow, goral, Himalayan thar and musk deer. Brown bears are seen on the meadows close to the treeline, while on the higher ridges snow leopards stalk *bharal*. Closer to the villages are langur, jungle cats and porcupines.

Birdlife includes many warblers, owls, cuckoos, woodpeckers, magpies and minivets in the forested regions. Pheasants are also found in forest clearings, while birds of prey include the lammergeier and golden eagle.

An obvious attraction is the Valley of the Flowers (see the boxed text, p167). However, Har ki Dun, the Khatling Glacier and the many *bugyals* (high-altitude meadows)

throughout the Garhwal also offer a profusion of wildflowers.

PLANNING

Permits & Regulations

The entrance to the Govind Wildlife Sanctuary & National Park (GWSNP) is located just below Naitwar. For foreigners there is a fee of Rs 100 for the first three days and Rs 50 per day thereafter. Indian trekkers pay Rs 15 for the first three days and Rs 5 for additional days. There is also a camera charge of Rs 50. Note that the GWSNP extends up to the Himachal border located just above the village of Sewa.

ACCESS TOWNS

There are number of towns where you will need to stay for at least a night before heading off on your trek, including the pilgrim and meditation centre at Rishikesh (p185), the delightful hill resort of Mussoorie (p183), and the bustling pilgrim centres at Uttarkashi (p186) and Joshimath (p182). See Towns & Facilities at the end of the chapter.

RUPIN PASS & KINNAUR

Duration 6 days
Distance 85km
Difficulty moderate
Start Naitwar
Finish Sangla
Nearest Town Mussoorie
Transport bus/taxi
Summary A remote trek from the Garhwal to Kinnaur, following trails through Hindu villages and across the snow-capped ridges of the Dhaula Dhar to the Sangla Valley.

This trek passes through Hindu villages, shepherd camps and alpine meadows before traversing the Rupin Pass over the Dhaula Dhar.

Acclimatise by spending extra days in the villages. From the campsites at the base of the pass, you can explore the extensive snowfields and glaciers beneath the crest of the Dhaula Dhar.

Views to the north of the pass include the impressive peaks of the Kinnaur Kailas Range, while to the south, endless verdant ridges stretch towards the Indian foothills.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The Rupin Pass can normally be crossed from late May until June. The settled post-monsoon season (mid-September to mid-October) is the best time to trek, before the first winter snows fall on the high ridges.

What to Bring

A tent, stove and food supplies for at least five days are essential. There is an ample supple supply of food and provisions in Naitwar.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 6 Kalpa-Kinnaur, Spiti & Shimla* for the northern sections of the trek and *Sheet 7 (Gangotri, Har ki Dun & Mussoorie)* for the southern sections. However, the trail route on the south side of the pass needs correction. The US Military U502 series 1:250,000 *NI 44-1 ref Chini* covers the route. The SFAR 1:150,000 *Garhwal Himalaya (West Section)* is by far the clearest map (based on the US 502 series), although the trails marked for this trek are inaccurate.

Trekking Agents

Himalayan Trekkers (☎ 983 725 8589; Sankri bazaar), about one-hour's drive above Naitwar, is the best option. They can arrange porters/guides for around Rs 300 per day. For each guide/porter, also budget for an allowance to include clothing, food and accommodation for two days to return to Sankri. Note that phone communication to Naitwar and Sankri is difficult so allow at least a day to finalise arrangements.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

The best way to get to Naitwar from Mussoorie is to take the bus to Purola (Rs 90) and from there a shared taxi (Rs 40). All up allow eight to nine hours.

There are buses from Sangla to Shimla (Rs 400, 10 hours) and to Rekong Peo (Rs 220, two hours).

THE TREK (see map p146)

Day 1: Naitwar to Sewa

6–7 hours, 19km

This relatively long stage can be split, with a night at Dola and a leisurely stage the

next day ascending the fields and rolling landscape to Sewa. Bearing this in mind it is a matter of choice as to whether to trek or get a ride up the dirt road to Dola.

From **Naitwar** (1450m) follow the trail just above the village that winds down to the **Tons River**. Cross the main bridge located just above the confluence of the Tons and **Rupin Rivers**. At 1405m it is also a far cry from the heights of the Rupin Pass. Follow the dirt road that can be avoided in places through mixed oak and conifer forest for 10km to **Dola** (1690m). To reach the village cross the bridge over the Rupin River and head up to the small bazaar that has little to recommend it bar a couple of **lodges** (d from Rs 100) that also prepare tea. Time from Naitwar is approximately three hours.

From Dola the trail remains on the true right of the valley and ascends for 3km. Here the trails split. The lower fork of the trail descends to the river and over the bridge to the substantial village of **Doni**. Take the upper trail that gradually winds above the river before a short, steep ascent to the settlement of **Borie** (2090m). It is a further 4km through rhododendron forest to the outlying potato and barley fields of Sewa.

Sewa (2100m), high above the Rupin River, is spread out across the hillside over a couple of kilometres. There is a good **campsite** just below the main trail about halfway through the village. Just to the north of the village is a distinctive two-storey Hindu temple constructed in a style merging local and Kinnaur traditions. This is not surprising given the proximity of the state boundaries of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh – reflecting the period when the kingdom of Kinnaur extended beyond the crest of the Dhaula Dhar and south towards the Tons Valley.

Day 2: Sewa to Jakhu

5½–6 hours, 17km

This stage explores the villages and trails that lead through forests of blue pine and silver fir. Tantalising glimpses up the side valleys to the peaks and snow-capped ridges of the Dhaula Dhar are a further bonus.

In **Sewa** follow the trail past the temple before descending to the banks of the **Rupin River**. At the first side valley, a substantial wood pile marks the border between **Uttarakhand** and **Himachal Pradesh**, although the Uttarakhand government administers most of the villages in the vicinity.

Remain on the true right of the Rupin River for 3km to where the trail meets a substantial bridge over the river. Do not cross the bridge but ascend the hillside to the north to the village and welcome *dhaba* at **Barta** (2350m). Time from Seva is around three hours. Continue up and around to **Jikson** (2400m) located high above the confluence of the Rupin and Nargin Rivers, Jikson has a village store and post office.

It is a further 3km to **Jakhu** (2700m). This includes a steep descent to a tributary, followed by an equally steep ascent to the highest village in the valley. Houses are set amid walnut, apricot and deodar trees. The campsite is just above the village. It also doubles as the children's playground, so be prepared to entertain the children until the very last urchin is hauled off to bed. The water supply is limited during the day, but available in the late afternoon and early morning. There is also a Forest Rest House just beyond the village.

Day 3: Jakhu to Upper Rupin Valley Camp

5–5½ hours, 15km

The trailheads above villages to the alpine meadows beneath a backdrop of the Dhaula Dhar. The meadows are particularly attractive in the spring when rhododendrons are in full bloom and the wildflowers, including edelweiss, blue poppies and marigolds, thrive along the margins of the snowmelt.

Ascend the well-defined trail through the fields before entering a magnificent spruce forest. The forest track gradually descends to the **Rupin River** before crossing a shepherds bridge, (snow bridge earlier in the season) to the true left of the valley. The time from the village to the bridge is around 1½ hours.

From Jakhu a trail of sorts follows the course of the boulder-strewn riverbed before ascending rhododendron and silver birch forest to a clearing that marks the entrance to a broad U-shaped valley set beneath the peaks and glaciers of the Dhaula Dhar. An impressive waterfall in the centre of the valley marks the route towards the pass.

CHANGES IN THE RUPIN VALLEY

In the near future, the traditional farming villages in the upper Rupin Valley will be linked by road that will bring them within a day's travel of Mussoorie. At present they are in the process of being connected to the electricity grid. This, together with the construction of more schools, will help them to adjust to developments that will extend their horizons well beyond the confines of the Rupin Valley.

Bearing this in mind, a road is now well under construction that will link the lower Tons Valley to a point just below the village of Jikson. The road will eventually ensure that it will be possible to reach Jaknu on the first day of the trek.

There are no end of campsites (3200m to 3300m) although the best is about 1km short of the waterfall. In late spring the meadows are also occupied by villagers who bring their cattle and sheep to graze on the lush pastures. A rest day here at Upper Rupin Valley Camp or at Waterfall Camp is highly recommended.

Day 4: Upper Rupin Valley Camp to Waterfall Camp

3 hours, 9km

This is a short stage before crossing the Rupin Pass. The views are very impressive south across the Tons Valley and forested ridges extending to Mussoorie, while to the north the peaks and glaciers of the Dhaula Dhar provide a dramatic backdrop.

Head on the true left of the valley towards the base of the waterfall. The trail ascends over scree to reach a grassy plateau about 200m above the main valley floor. The trail will be under snow until the end of June and care should be taken when crossing the icy gullies. It then winds across to the true right of the valley, fording the main stream above the lowest waterfall. It is a steep ascent towards the prominent rock cliffs before the trail winds around to a large meadow just above the highest waterfall. The campsite (3970m) at Waterfall Camp is one of the finest in the Garhwal.

Day 5: Waterfall Camp to Alpine Camp via Rupin Pass

4½–5 hours, 10km

This challenging stage includes ascending snowfields and climbing a particularly steep, rocky gully to the Rupin Pass. From the pass there are spectacular views of the Kinnaur Kailas Range. The pass also marks the watershed between the Indus and the Ganges catchment. To the south the Rupin River flows into the Tons, the Yamunotri and then into the Ganges, while to the north the Baspa River flows into the Sutlej and then into the Indus.

The trail from Waterfall Camp heads up the hillside for 250m, from where there are impressive views of hanging glaciers, snowfields and the route to the pass. The trail heads across boulder fields to a broad gravel plain at the base of the pass. Do not continue up the broad valley to the west but head towards the pass – the lowest point along a serrated rocky ridge.

From the base, it is a further 100m climb over boulders to a narrow gully before a final 200m ascent to **Rupin Pass** (4540m). Take care not to dislodge any rocks that could endanger group members below you. In spring, until early July, the gully will be under snow and a length of rope may be useful. The time from camp to the pass is around three hours. The effort is rewarded with views of the **Kinnaur Kailas Range** including **Jorkanden** (6473m), **Saro** (6080m) and the peaks in the vicinity of the Charang La, as well as the peaks and glaciers in the immediate vicinity of the pass.

From the pass there is a gradual descent at first over scree (snow earlier in the season) before heading across alpine pastures on the true left or west side of the valley to a choice of campsites at around 4000m at Alpine Camp. If the weather is unsettled there is the option to keep going on down to **Kanda**.

Day 6: Alpine Camp to Sangla

4–5 hours, 15km

It's a long way down to Sangla. During the exhilarating descent there are further glorious views of the Kinnaur Kailas Range, while the villages of the Sangla Valley can be seen over 1000m below.

The trail winds from Alpine Camp down the alpine ridges for 3km to the confluence

of a larger valley to the east. The trail then gradually rounds the contours before descending to **Kanda** (3400m), a summer settlement where villagers from Sangla tend to their animals and also manage fields of potatoes and barely. There are campsites in the vicinity, if extending the previous day after crossing the Rupin Pass.

Birch trees on the far side of the valley are a sure indication that there is still a long way down to the Sangla Valley. Depending on the state of the trail and the condition of your knees, allow a further three hours to descend through blue pine and deodar forest to the main bridge over the **Baspa River**. Cross it and complete the short ascent to the Sangla bazaar (2680m) before heading to the nearest tea stall.

HAR KI DUN & RUINSARA LAKE

Duration 6 days
Distance 77km
Difficulty easy–moderate
Start Sankri
Finish Taluka
Nearest Town Mussoorie
Transport bus/taxi
Summary Trek through Hindu villages to the verdant pastures of Har ki Dun and Ruinsara Lake, sitting beneath the peaks and glaciers of the Dhaula Dhar.

This trek is a fine introduction to trekking in the Garhwal. There are no pass crossings and it is relatively straightforward to organise. The well-defined trail in the Govind National Park is renowned for wildflowers. Plan an additional day or two for acclimatisation before ascending to Har ki Dun, from where there are opportunities to explore the peaks and glaciers of the Swargarohini Range. The foray to Ruinsara Lake adds a further dimension to the trek.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trail is mostly clear of snow by early May, and wildflowers bloom in May and June. Mid-September until mid-October provides the ideal climate for trekking.

What to Bring

It is possible to get by without a tent, while meals can be cooked by the *chowkidar* (caretaker) at the GMVN hotels. However, if camping, it is best to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables at Purola or Naitwar, as there are limited supplies of fresh vegetables in Sankri. Accommodation can be crowded during the student holidays in May and June.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 7 Gangotri, Har ki Dun & Mussoorie*. Also refer to the Survey of India Trekking map series 1:250,000 *Gangotri–Yamunotri*. The SFAR 1:150,000 *Garhwal Himalaya (West Section)* is the best available section for this trek. The US Military U502 series 1:250,000, *NI 44-1 ref Chini* also covers the route.

Trekking Agents

At the head of the bazaar in Sankri, **Himalayan Trekkers** (☎ 983 725 8589) can organise porters and guides. As this is a standard trek, porters should cost around Rs 250 per day. Note that communication to Sankri is difficult, so allow a day to finalise arrangements.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

Get a bus from Mussoorie to Purola (Rs 90) and a shared taxi to Sankri (Rs 50). Allow around eight to 10 hours from Mussoorie to Sankri.

There are shared taxis from Sankri to Taluka for Rs 25 per seat.

THE TREK (see map p146)

Day 1: Sankri to Taluka

3–4 hours, 10km

Although a dirt road extends from **Sankri** to Taluka, completing the stage on foot is not a great hardship. Only a handful of vehicles ply the route so there is time to adjust to a gentler pace and to appreciate the wild roses and irises, bamboo, chestnut, sycamore and deodar trees that line the trail. There is a **GMVN Rest House** at **Sankr** (dm/d Rs 160/500; May-Oct).

From Sankri (1800m) follow the dirt road that winds high above the Ruinsara River. There is a campsite beside a beautiful stream about 2km below Taluka, which might be useful if you leave Sankri late in the day.

The village of **Taluka** (1950m) is devoid of charm. It is centred on a concrete fish-breeding pond that is complemented by the imposing concrete structure of the **GMVN Rest House** (dm/d Rs 160/500; May-Oct).

It's a pity the state government did not draw on the traditional wood and stone pahari construction found in nearby villages in the Har ki Dun Valley. To complete the tale of woe, the *dhabas* are among some of the most fly-blown anywhere in northern India. The redeeming factor is the nearby Forest Rest House just above the village where there is a small campsite with commanding views up the valley.

To shorten Day 2, you can continue to one of many forest camps beyond Taluka.

Day 2: Taluka to Seema

5–6 hours, 14km

This delightful stage winds through tiny farming settlements and fields of barley and wheat, as well as apple orchards amid forests of ancient oak, maple, spruce and chestnut. The villages are part of the Govind Wildlife Sanctuary & National Park and they are required to adhere to forestry and environmental regulations to help preserve the character of the valley.

From Taluka, the trail descends to the river valley and continues through the forest on the true left of the valley. In spring, there are plenty of Gujar encampments established as they travel to the head of the valley. After 3km, the trail winds below **Datmir**. The trail continues to ascend on the true left of the valley, winding through temperate forest to the village of **Gang Ghar**, while the substantial village of **Osla** with around 20 to 30 houses appears on the opposite side of the valley.

Seema (2500m) consists of a row of smoky *dhabas* and a **GMVN Rest House** (dm/d Rs 160/500; May-Oct) that, like the Rest House in Taluka, was constructed with little sympathy for the traditional pahari style of the houses in the nearby villages.

There is a campsite 2km up the valley en route to Har ki Dun.

Day 3: Seema to Har ki Dun

5 hours, 12km

This provides an opportunity to climb high above the villages and forested valleys to alpine meadows that afford uninterrupted views of the high peaks. At Har ki Dun these include the Swargarohini peaks as well as the impressive backdrop of the Dhaula Dhar. The excellent camping together with the array of wildflowers at Har ki Dun are an added highlight to the day.

From Seema, cross the main bridge directly above the village. The trail remains on the true right of the valley all the way to Har ki Dun. The trail winds high above the valley floor to a vantage point above the confluence of the **Har ki Dun** and **Ruinsara Rivers** with impressive views of **Bandarpunch** (6316m) at the head of the Ruinsara Valley. The trail then ascends to a ridge from where it is possible to appreciate the location of Har ki Dun. It is a further 4km to camp following a trail that winds through silver fir forest and a series of meadows where villagers from Osla graze their cattle in summer.

Har ki Dun (3510m) is beyond the confluence of the two alpine valleys with commanding views of the **Swargarohini** peaks. There is a Forest Rest House as well as a **GMVN Rest House** (dm/d Rs 160/500; May-Oct).

SIDE TRIP: NORTH OF HAR KI DUN

2 hours, 6km return

From Har ki Dun, trek north across the flowered meadows towards the peaks and ridges of the **Dhaula Dhar**. There are excellent views back down the valley, while the route towards the **Borasu Pass** and the Sangla Valley can also be appreciated.

SIDE TRIP: TOWARDS SWARGAROHINI

6 hours, 12km return

A second option leads up the alpine valley to the north of **Swargarohini Range**, including **Swargarohini I** (6252m). This peak is famous in Hindu legend, being the 'gateway to heaven' taken by the Pandava brothers. It is a day trek to reach the snout of the Jamdar Glacier and return to Har ki Dun camp.

Day 4: Har ki Dun to Dev Thach

3 hours, 10km

A diversion to the verdant glade at Dev Thach is a bonus. The beautiful camp is an ideal base for the trek to Ruinsara Lake as well as an opportunity to share the company of Gujar shepherds with their herds of buffalo grazing in the nearby meadows. The Gujar are particularly hospitable, although

it is a matter of speculation as to how long they will be able to remain here. Their traditional grazing rights have so far prevented the authorities from shifting them outside the confines of the Govind National Park.

This is a short stage back down towards Seema. Do not take any shortcuts here. Local porters may point out a log bridge across two huge boulders just above the confluence of the Har ki Dun and Ruinsara Rivers, but this crossing is dangerous. Instead, go back down the trail as if returning to Seema and Sankri. En route, the large meadow on the opposite side of the valley – **Dev Thach** (3000m) – can be appreciated. Cross the higher of the two bridges above Seema and climb 3km to camp in the meadow.

Day 5: Ruinsara Lake Circuit

7 hours, 14km

Ruinsara Lake, surrounded by alpine pastures and low rhododendrons is considered sacred by the villagers in the Har ki Dun Valley. It is not hard to appreciate why in its idyllic setting beneath the snow-capped ridges that form the Swargarohini Range.

From Dev Thach, pass the Gujar huts and take the trail that descends steeply to the bridge over the Ruinsara River. Cross the river and begin a gradual ascent. The trail leads through mixed forest and meadows of forget-me-nots and buttercups. Early in the season, residual snowfields cover the trail, and there are several easy stream crossings. The trail gradually ascends above the conifer forest. About halfway to the lake, the valley widens and crosses flowered meadows where shepherds graze their flocks in summer. There are also some delightful birch copses and juniper – a sure sign that you have ascended above 3000m before reaching the serene waters of **Ruinsara Lake** (3350m). From the lake, it is a three-hour descent back to Dev Thach.

Day 6: Dev Thach/Seema to Taluka

5–6 hours, 17km

The return to **Taluka** can be completed in a day. It is a one-hour trek from Dev Thach to Seema, followed by around five hours from **Seema** to Taluka. From Taluka, you may be fortunate enough to find a taxi or truck and avoid the final days trek to **Sankri**.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: BALI PASS (YAMUNOTRI PASS) TRAVERSE

7 days, 74km, demanding

This is an exhilarating traverse over the Bali Pass linking the villages of the Har ki Dun Valley with the pilgrim trail to Yamunotri. Although the pass is snowbound for most of the year, it is not technically demanding. To ensure proper acclimatisation, a side trip to Har ki Dun is recommended before heading to the upper Ruinsara Valley and the base of the pass.

From **Sankri** see Day 1 and 2 to Seema, with the option of heading to **Har ki Dun** the following day. Return to Seema (2500m) or the nearby meadow of Dev Thach (3000m) on Day 4 with time to continue to the sacred **Ruinsara Lake** (3350m). On Day 5 ascend the flowered meadows of the upper Ruinsara Valley before heading up a side valley to the base of the pass. The location of the **Bali Pass** (4780m) is deceptive, it is a small col at the head of a steep, snow gully. Once on the pass on Day 6, savour views of the **Swargarohini peaks** to the north, while **Bandarpunch** is one of the many summits that rise above the forested ridges and alpine meadows to the south. The descent from the pass is straightforward, although a rock band just above the camp may require a rope for laden porters. Day 7 is all the way down to the ancient pilgrim trial just above Janki. Do not take a short cut down the *monkey route* direct from camp to Yamunotri unless you claim a recent ancestry that enables you to swing effortlessly from one sapling branch to another. An optional walk up to the temple of **Yamunotri** (3293m) is possible before either hitching a ride on a taxi or trekking the final 1km to **Hanuman Chatti** (2400m).

To reach Sankri, there are daily buses from Dehra Dun that stop just below Mussoorie (10 hours). From Hanuman Chatti there is a bus to Mussoorie (six hours) connecting to Dehra Dun (two hours).

A permit is required to undertake this trek in Govind Wildlife Sanctuary & National Park that can be purchased at **Naitwar**. Budget Rs 100 for the first three days and Rs 50 thereafter. It is also essential to ensure that your guide and porters are familiar with the route and are well equipped before setting out.

SUMMER RAMBLE IN THE HIMALAYA

In the 19th century it was not unusual for the British in India to head off into the mountains for months at a time. Sometimes they would trek from Mussoorie north to Ladakh before heading to Kashmir, following a challenging itinerary that would be hard to match today. It was not considered extraordinary to traverse a snowbound pass with a retinue of staff and porters that was sometimes weeks away from the nearest trailhead, or to sleep on an exposed mountain ridge wrapped in nothing more than a woollen blanket while on the lookout for a prized stag. Living off the land and hunting for their supper was often the norm. After the expedition, a report would be filed detailing the evidence of big game. Another report was filed for political intelligence, particularly if trekking on the northern borderlands of India.

It cannot be denied that the summer rambler had a close affinity with the mountains. Indeed, it is not hard to believe that the 19th-century summer ramblers would nowadays swap their rifles for binoculars and a field guide while trekking for weeks at a time in pursuit of wildlife.

DODI TAL & YAMUNOTRI

Duration 4 days
Distance 53km
Difficulty easy–moderate
Start Sangam Chatti
Finish Hanuman Chatti
Nearest Town Uttarkashi
Transport bus/shared taxi
Summary Easily accessible but uncrowded, this trek over the Darwa Pass to a pilgrim town affords inspiring views of the Dhaula Dhar.

An ideal first-time trek in the Garhwal. The trek includes camping alongside the exquisite Dodi Tal before traversing the Darwa Pass. The pass affords impressive views of Bandarpunch and the snowy ridges of the Dhaula Dhar as well as the forested ridges and meadows leading down to the pilgrim town of Hanuman Chatti.

There are interesting side trips, including a foray to the Bandarpunch Base Camp and a trek along the pilgrim trail to Yamunotri – the first of the Char Dham stages followed by thousands of Hindu pilgrims each year.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The Darwa Pass can be crossed by mid-May. The spring trekking season extends to late June before the monsoon rain. September and October are ideal and afford the clearest mountain views.

What to Bring

A tent and stove are essential, with a minimum of two days' food for the stages between Dodi Tal and Hanuman Chatti.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 7 Gangotri, Har ki Dun & Mussoorie*. Also refer to the Survey of India Trekking map series 1:250,000 *Gangotr–Yamunotri*. The SFAR 1:150,000 *Garhwal Himalaya (West Section)* is the best available section for this trek. The US Military U502 series 1:250,000 *NI 44-5 ref Dehra Dun* also covers the route.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

There are three buses each day from Uttarkashi (Rs 14, one hour) to the trailhead several kilometres below Sangam Chatti.

From Hanuman Chatti, there is a bus to Mussoorie (Rs 95, six hours). There are also three buses each day to Uttarkashi (Rs 145, six hours). The last bus leaves around 2pm – handy for porters returning to Uttarkashi.

THE TREK (see map p146)

Day 1: Sangam Chatti to Agoda

1½–2 hours, 7km

This is a short stage to experience the lifestyle of the hills, a world away from the bustling pilgrim town of Uttarkashi. The camp also affords fine views of the forested ridges and settlements high above the Asi Ganga.

The trailhead at **Sangam Chatti** (1350m) consists of several *dhabas* alongside a tributary of the **Asi Ganga**. Cross the bridge

over the side stream and follow the trail on the true right of the valley leading to Agoda. After less than 1km the trail splits – follow the lower trail that ascends through mixed forest. As it approaches the village, the trail is lined with rose bushes and hedgerows.

Agoda (2250m) is a prosperous village consisting of around 30 two-storey, slate-roofed houses, each with a stone courtyard. To ensure maximum yield from the land the spring wheat crop is harvested in May, allowing time for a second crop of potatoes by autumn. There is a Forest Rest House at the far end of the village where there is a small campsite. There are a couple of lodges at Agoda including the **Panwar Tourist Lodge** (r Rs 100).

Day 2: Agoda to Dodi Tal

6 hours, 16km

This involves a steady ascent though mixed oak and rhododendron forest to the sacred lake of Dodi Tal. The temple, devoted to Ganesh, is set in an idyllic location on the banks of the lake. Reserve a day to wander the nearby forests and meadows before crossing the Darwa Pass.

After leaving Agoda the trail leads around to a side river and a number of *dhabas* before a gradual ascent through oak, cedar and deodar forest high above the **Asi Ganga**. After about three hours there is a very welcome *dhaba* before a short ascent to the forest clearing at **Majhi** (2950m) where villagers from Agoda tend to their cattle in the summer. Above the clearing the views up the Asi Ganga confirm the vast forest reserves – the preserve of black bear and also forest leopard as is evidenced by the heavily studded collars worn by the shepherd dogs. From Majhi it takes a further 1½ to two hours to reach Dodi Tal.

After the long climb up through the forest, the sight of **Dodi Tal** (3310m) comes as a welcome relief. The lake is no more than 1km in circumference and is set amid flowered meadows and a forest of oak, conifer and rhododendrons. The **GMVN Rest House** (d Rs 900) is located on the east bank of the lake while there is a beautiful campsite on an open meadow to the north of the lake. However, the rest house may be fully booked, so the basic shelter and food at one of the *dhabas* beside the lake may be the only option.

There are also Gujar encampments in the vicinity of the lake from where the shepherds supply milk and curd to Agoda and villages around Uttarkashi. It is also interesting to note that this is as far east as the Gujar shepherds settle in the Indian Himalaya.

Day 3: Dodi Tal to Bikdo via Darwa Pass

5–6 hours, 15km

This is the most demanding stage of the trek. Get started early to appreciate the range of peaks stretching beyond Gangotri as far as Nanda Devi. North of the Darwa pass, the peak of Bandarpunch (6316m) dominates the upper part of the valley while Swargarohini I (6252m) rises above the Har ki Dun Valley. To the west the views extend all the way across the alpine meadows and

DODI TAL

Dodi Tal is considered a sacred lake and was for generations an important staging point for pilgrims as they made their way along the mountain trails from Hanuman Chatti to Uttarkashi. The pilgrims would seek food and shelter in the Hindu temple dedicated to Ganesh on the east bank of the lake. The pilgrims would spend several days in the vicinity of the temple performing their *darshan* (prayers) first to Shiva and Parvati, who guard the entrance to the inner temple, before offering prayers to Ganesh. Nowadays only a handful of pilgrims visit the temple, which is falling into disrepair.

Given the religious sensibilities it is not surprising that fishing is banned in the lake, although trekkers are not necessarily deterred. When questioned about this flagrant breaking of the rules, the fishing inspector gave his assurance that it didn't matter, as he had never seen an amateur angler catch anything! A ingenious solution that keeps all parties, including the resident priest at the temple, happy.

down the forested ridges and farming settlements to Hanuman Chatti.

The trail to the Darwa Pass ascends the valley at the far end of the lake. It crosses the stream flowing into the lake several times before the valley widens. Follow the true right valley that heads towards the pass. It's a consistent climb through flowered meadows – while the rhododendrons remain in bloom until mid-June – before a final short, steep ascent to the pass. The climb to the **Darwa Pass** (4150m) will take around two to three hours or could be a day walk out of Dodi Tal.

From the pass follow the higher trail that winds around the contours and across ridges covered in juniper. In places the trail is no more than an ill-defined goat track. However, the tracks all head in the same direction, while **Bandarpunch** and the adjacent peaks provide a constant source of inspiration on the far side of the valley. After 3km to 4km the Gujar settlement of Bikdo can be seen about 500m down the hillside. Commence a steady descent to a rocky cliff before climbing down one of the gullies to the meadow at **Bikdo** (3200m) set amid oak and conifer forest. The Gujar shepherds camp just below the clearing leaving their buffalo to graze on the higher meadows.

SIDE TRIP: BASE OF BANDARPUNCH

3 days, 25km return

From **Darwa Pass**, a steep descent leads through meadows and forest to the Hanuman Ganga. Cross the river by a birch bridge (of sorts) and continue up the true right of the valley. The trail follows the valley floor for 1km before ascending a low ridge and leading through a series of meadows and rhododendron forests to the upper valley. The time from the pass to the alpine camp (3700m) is two to three hours. From the camp, it is a day walk to the snout of the **Bandarpunch Glacier**.

Retrace the route to Darwa Pass.

Day 4: Bikdo to Hanuman Chatti

4–5 hours, 15km

It's a long descent to Hanuman Chatti following a remote forest trail to the villages located high above the Hanuman Ganga.

Before heading off check with the Gujar shepherds who will point you in the right direction. The trail leads through a forest of oak, blue pine and bamboo. Even when the trail peters out it is relatively straightforward to relocate at one of the many forest clearings before emerging at the outlying fields of **Nichani** (2970m). Time from camp is around three hours. It's a further hour down to the substantial village of **Nisu** (2660m) and striking distance of the trailhead. Follow the well-marked trail down to a bridge over a tributary of the Hanuman Ganga and from here it's 1km to **Hanuman Chatti** (2400m), where there is a **GMVN Rest House** (dm/d Rs 190/825).

If considering a trek to Yamunotri the next day, there is a campsite just below the bridge about 500m above the bazaar on the road to Yamunotri.

SIDE TRIP: YAMUNOTRI

1 day, 24km return

This trek to an ancient temple at the source of the **Yamuna River** is the first stage of the Char Dham (see boxed text, p160), undertaken each season by many thousands of Hindu pilgrims. The trek can now be completed in a day by catching a taxi up to the village of **Janki Chatti** (2650m). From here the walk begins; a trail toll of Rs 50 is collected just above the village.

For most pilgrims this is their first day out in the mountains so expect to adjust your pace as families and their teams of porters stop at every switchback on the steep climb up to the temple. The altitude also takes its toll. **Yamunotri Temple** (3293m) is located in the centre of the gorge, enclosed by high, snow-capped ridges. The original temple was built in the 19th century by Maharani Gularia of Jaipur, though the current building is of more recent origin. The temple has been rebuilt a number of times to replace previous iterations which have crumbled under the relentless onslaught of the elements. One of the unique aspects of ritual practice at the site has always included the cooking of raw rice in the hot springs to make a *prasad* (sanctified offering). Allow three hours to reach the temple where there are plenty of *dhabas* and lodges and a GMVN Rest House. The return hike to Janku Chatti takes two hours with time to either wander down the former pilgrim trail or catch a shared taxi back to Hanuman Chatti.

CHAR DHAM

Each year many thousands of Indian pilgrims travel to Uttarakhand for the Char Dham – to visit the four most scared sources of the Ganges at Yamunotri, Gaumukh, Kedarnath and Badrinath. In May it is easy to appreciate the scale of the pilgrimage when a huge camp city is established at Rishikesh alongside the banks of the Ganges. For many pilgrims this will be their first experience in the mountains and the first time they have seen snow. As they set out on the first stage of their trek to Yamunotri, many wear only a threadbare shawl and a plastic raincoat to protect them from the worst of the elements. No one can deny the pilgrims' resolve. An extended family ranging from a tiny infant to aging grandparents slowly but surely ascend to over 3000m. Yet commercialisation is almost restrained. There are no 'I've done the Char Dham' T-shirts. Perhaps this is a reflection on the deep spiritual significance of the pilgrimage that will remain with the devotees long after they return to the scorching Indian plains.

SOURCE OF THE GANGES

Duration 5 days
Distance 52km
Difficulty easy–moderate
Start/Finish Gangotri
Nearest Town Uttarkashi
Transport bus
Summary Follow the pilgrim trail to Gaumukh before ascending to the meadow of Tapovan beneath the sacred summit of Shivling.

The trek to Gaumukh is undertaken by thousands of Hindu pilgrims en route to the sacred source of the Ganges. For many it is a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity to cleanse their souls at Gaumukh where the silent waters flow from under a huge wall of ice.

On the first day most pilgrims normally head straight to Bhojbasa and depart early the next morning to offer their *darshan* (prayers) at Gaumukh before returning to Gangotri.

While the company of pilgrims has its own attractions, it is recommended to continue the trek to Tabovan (4450m). Acclimatisation is essential, as well as a reasonable standard of fitness, as the trek across the glacial moraine and up to the huge meadow set beneath Shivling is tough by anyone's standards.

However, before making arrangements it is imperative to check out the new regulations that may seriously impact on any ambitious itinerary.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trail is normally open by early May and is regularly followed until late June. The monsoon rain in July and August can (as elsewhere in the Garhwal) lead to landslides across the trail. Mid-September until mid-October is ideal for trekking.

What to Bring

A tent and stove are essential when trekking above Gaumukh. Also bring food supplies for the time at Tapovan.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 7 Gangotri, Har ki Dun & Mussoorie*. Refer to the Survey of India Trekking map series 1:250,000 *Gangotri–Yamunotri*. The SFAR 1:150,000 *Garhwal Himalaya (West Section)* is the best available section for this trek. The US Military U502 series 1:250,000 *NI 44-5 ref Dehra Dun* also covers the route.

Permits & Regulations

The Divisional Forest Office in Uttarkashi recently introduced regulations to control the movement of pilgrims and trekkers above Gangotri. To quote from the present regulations:

- Only 150 tourists (including porters) will be permitted to visit Gaumukh each day.
- Permits will be issued at the District Forest Office in Uttarkashi on a 'first come, first served' basis. (They are not issued on the spot at Gangotri.)
- The fees are Rs 50 for two days for Indian tourists, and Rs 25 per day thereafter and

Rs 350 for two days foreign tourists and Rs 175 per day thereafter.
- Movement of mules and horses is banned inside the Gangotri National Park.

Many thousands of pilgrims visit Gaumukh each season. It seems that the best way to deal with this is to make an advance booking with one of the trekking agents in Uttarkashi who will make the necessary arrangements for you. As always, double-check regulations well in advance, for as the final regulation specifies – 'Visitors not having permits will be stopped and returned back' before adding 'Please no argument with local staff'.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

There are regular buses from Uttarkashi to Gangotri (Rs 80, four to five hours). The last bus from Gangotri to Uttarkashi normally leaves at around 2pm.

THE TREK (see map p147)

Day 1: Gangotri to Chirbasa

4 hours, 9km

A gentle introduction to pilgrimage trekking with an opportunity to savour the spectacular views of the Bhagirathi peaks at the head of the valley. Gangotri has many small hotels, including the **GMVN Rest House** (dm Rs 100/400).

From Gangotri (3050m), the trail passes the Gangotri Temple on the true right of the valley. Just beyond the temple, concrete steps lead up to the main trail and the entrance to the Gangotri National Park. There is also a sign promoting the work of the Himalayan Environmental Trust who have made great strides with their work in the last decade. The trail is well defined with stone markers every kilometre. After the first 4km, there are *dhabas* at **Raj Ghat** (3250m), where a tributary flows into the valley.

Beyond Raj Ghat the glacial valley widens affording fine views of the Bhagirathi peaks including **Bhagirathi** (6856m).

At **Chirbasa** (3600m), *dhabas* line the trail. There is a sheltered campsite below the trail close to the river. Just above Chirbasa there is a plantation of over 1000 spruce, silver fir, blue pine and cedar sapling planted by a Uttarakashi-based NGO.

Day 2: Chirbasa to Bhojbasa

2–2½ hours, 7km

The pilgrim trail ascends from Chirbasa (the place of pines) to Bhojbasa (the place of birch). Once on the trail, an inspiring panorama unfolds, including the huge dimensions of the Bhagirathi Range as well as **Shivling** (the Matterhorn of the Garhwal; 6543m), which rises high above the source of the Ganges.

Back down the valley, **Bhrigu Parbat** (6041m) looms high above Gangotri. The trail gradually ascends above the treeline, while juniper bushes are scattered up the otherwise barren hillside. Just below Bhojbasa, the trail leads through an extensive boulder field – a hot and dusty section on a warm day.

Bhojbasa (3790m) is a rather desolate camp with a crowded **GMVN Rest House** (dm/d Rs 80/400) and a shelter for less affluent pilgrims. The rooms at the Rest House are all heavily booked, particularly in May and June. Most trekkers plan to head to Gaumukh early the next day with sufficient time to complete the long trek back to Gangotri later the same day. A small temple and campsite are down towards the river. At dusk there is also a possibility of seeing *bharal* on the surrounding hillside.

Day 3: Bhojbasa to Gaumukh & Tapovan

4–5 hours, 10km

For Hindu pilgrims the trek to Gaumukh (Cow's Mouth) is the highlight of their month-long Char Dham. Beyond here the route heads up to the magnificent alpine meadow of Tapovan – a world removed from the crowded pilgrim trails. The huge meadow attracts a steady stream of trekkers and a handful sadhus who meditate here throughout the long summer months.

From Bhojbasa, trek for an hour to reach the *dhabas* below Gaumukh. This is as far as the porters go. It is a further 2km to **Gaumukh** (3890m). The trail leads through moraine and across sandy flats where a handful of sadhus take up residence in nearby caves during the pilgrimage season. It is hard-going, particularly for pilgrims who have never been to the mountains before.

SHIPTON & TILMAN: THE 1934 BADRINATH–KEDARNATH TRAVERSE

The remote mountain trails linking the sacred sources of the Ganges have been the subject of myth and legend since the earliest pilgrims ventured into the Himalaya. The high trails linking Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath were the particular focus of attention for a number of expeditions during the 1930s, including that of the legendry British mountaineers Shipton and Tilman. During their epic expedition to Nanda Devi and its environs in 1934, they explored the possibility of crossing the watersheds linking Badrinath, Gangotri and Kedarnath. Although pilgrim folklore maintained that such routes existed, the demands of climbing high and remote glaciers led Shipton and Tilman to think otherwise.

After forging their way up the Rishi Ganga to the Nanda Devi Sanctuary in May 1934, the team of Shipton, Tilman and three Sherpas turned their attention to the Badrinath–Gangotri crossing. From Badrinath, they headed up the Arwa Valley, exploring several side glaciers before crossing the Kalindi Khal (5960m), the pass marking the watershed between the Alaknanda and the Bhagirathi river systems. Beyond the pass the team descended to the Gangotri Glacier and Gaumukh. Returning via the same route, the group seemed ideally prepared for the next challenge – the crossing from Badrinath to Kedarnath.

The party prepared for a week's trekking and set out on 5 August, immediately encountering the full force of the monsoon. Incessant rain obliterated views of even the most impressive peaks as well as the route for the days ahead. They ascended the Satopath Glacier before negotiating a formidable icefall leading to the pass.

It took five long and demanding days to reach the Satopath Col (5420m), marking the watershed between the Alaknanda and the Mandakini river systems. The thick monsoon clouds prevented any view of the heavily forested terrain leading towards Kedarnath, or of the steep icefall below the pass. When the team finally made it down to the upper forest level, their supplies were almost exhausted and their gear was soaked.

On 12 August, after travelling only a small distance down the gorge, they reached a side river flowing from the slopes of the Chaukhamba Range. It took two days to find a crossing point. They were reduced to living off the land, while doing their best to protect themselves from the rain. On a typical day they would travel no more than 2km, existing on a diet of wild fungus and the ubiquitous bamboo. On 18 August they finally reached the established pilgrim trail to Kalimath.

In view of the exceptional terrain, it is not surprising that the route was not successfully completed again until 64 years later. In 1998 a small joint British/Indian expedition (whose party included Eric Shipton's son, John) completed the route. Refer to the 1999 Himalayan Journal for a full description of the 1998 crossing. For the complete account of the 1934 traverse, read *Nanda Devi* by Eric Shipton, now published in The Six Mountain-Travel Books.

The last 500m to the source of the Ganges follows a trail along the riverbank to where the pilgrims conduct their *darshan* as close as possible to where the stream flows from under a high glacial ice wall.

The trail to Tapovan diverts from the main pilgrim trail just before the final 500m hike to Gaumukh. It ascends the terminal moraine of the **Gangotri Glacier** for about 200m before splitting. The trail to the true right of the valley leads to Nandanban (see Side Trip), while the true left trail (on the south side of the valley) leads to Tapovan. Even with the rock cairns marking the trail, the route is not easy to follow and a local guide is essential.

The trail traverses the terminal moraine above Gaumukh before rising abruptly for 30 to 40 minutes up the side ridge to Tapovan. Take great care not to dislodge rocks and boulders onto trekkers below.

Tapovan (4450m) is a very pleasant surprise. A huge meadow complete with bubbling streams, wildflowers and many camping spots beneath the imposing peak of Shivling. On the far side of the glacier are the Bhagirathi peaks, including Bhagirathi I (6856). At Tapovan, basic *dhaba* accommodation run by sadhus may be

available. Before leaving Guamukh check with the *dhaba* owners as they will know what is available.

SIDE TRIP: TO GANDHAVA

2 hours, 3km return

If spending a rest day at **Tapovan**, it is recommended to ascend the ridge to the east of Tapovan to the **sacred lake** of **Gandhava** (4350m) – known as the lake of the divine souls. The ascent follows a trail directly above the meadow and takes less than an hour. There is a **Shiva lingam** close to the lake while the views back down and across the **Gangotri Glacier** are particularly impressive.

Days 4 & 5: Tapovan to Gangotri

2 days, 26km

It takes a couple of hours to descend directly to **Gaumukh** before following the pilgrim trail to **Chirbasa** for the night. The following morning it should take no more than three hours to return to **Gangotri**, with time to catch onward transport the same day.

KHATLING GLACIER

Duration 7 days
Distance 120km
Difficulty easy–moderate
Start/Finish Ghuttu
Nearest Town Rishikesh
Transport bus
Summary Trek through Hindu villages, mixed forest and flowered meadows to an impressive range of peaks and glaciers above the spectacular Khatling Glacier.

Although Ghuttu is marked as a small and rather insignificant village on most maps, it is the starting point for a spectacular trek to the source of the Bhilan Ganga, an important tributary of the Ganges. Indeed, this glacier trek compares favourably with the other classics to the Pindari Glacier and Milam Glacier in Kumaon.

The trek stages lead through traditional farming villages, extensive forests and alpine meadows that afford magnificent campsites before reaching the snout of the Khatling Glacier. The itinerary also includes a camp at Chobia, the base for a side trip to Marsar Tal for more unrivalled views. From Marsar Tal it's also possible to continue across the high ridges to Kedarnath and Gaurikund.

PLANNING

When to Trek

May and June are ideal to appreciate the wildflowers and rhododendrons before the monsoon rain. Mid-September until mid-October is a further opportunity to trek before the onset of winter snows.

What to Bring

A tent, stove and appropriate warm clothing are essential. Food is difficult to obtain from the villages; carry all supplies.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 7 Gangotri, Har ki Dun & Mussoorie*. Also refer to the Survey of India Trekking map series 1:250,000 *Gangotri–Yamunotri*. The SFAR 1:150,000 *Garhwal Himalaya (West Section)* is the best available section for this trek. The US Military U502 series 1:250,000 *NI 44-5 ref Dehra Dun* also covers the route.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

There is only one direct bus from Rishikesh to Ghuttu (Rs 160, seven hours), which leaves early in the morning. Alternatively, change buses at Tehri. From Ghuttu, the 7am bus goes direct to Rishikesh, while the last bus to Tehri (with onward connections) departs at 2pm.

THE TREK (see map p147)

Day 1: Ghuttu to Reeh

3½–4 hours, 10km

The first day is a short stage to acclimatise and ascend the upper Bhilan Ganga Valley. There are no trekking agents in Ghuttu; however, the *chowkidar* at the Forest Rest House can put you in touch with local porters. They charge around Rs 200 per day. There is a **GMNV** at Ghutti (dm/r Rs 90/350).

Beyond **Ghuttu** (1520m) follow the village trail on the true right of the river to **Devling** before a gradual ascent through chir pine, rhododendron and bamboo. There is a split in the trail after about 7km. Take the lower trail following the course of

the river to the village of **Reeh** (2130m), which has a well-appointed **GMVN Forest Rest House** (dm/r, Rs 90/350). The campsite is just above the Rest House.

Day 2: Reeh to Gangi

3½–4 hours, 12km

The ridges high above the Bhilan Ganga afford commanding views back to Ghuttu and the extensive chir forests that extend south to Tehri. The typical slate-roofed houses of Nerlan and Gangi provide a further perspective of the Hindu settlements in this comparatively remote valley.

Cross the bridge over the tributary just beyond **Reeh** and commence a steady 500m ascent to a series of meadows high above the valley. From the top of the ridge, fine views extend back down the valley to the ridge of Panwali Kantha and the region south of Ghuttu. The trail continues through oak and rhododendron forest to Nerlan (2550m). It's a further 4km to **Gangi** (2590m), one of the largest villages in the valley, with around 30 houses. There is a Hindu temple just before the village and the **GMVN Rest House** (dm/r Rs 90/350) is just beyond the village.

Day 3: Gangi to Kharsoli

6 hours, 15km

The untouched forests above Gangi are some of the finest in this region of the Himalaya. High above the trail are glimpses of the snow-capped peaks at the head of the valley and a taste of the days ahead.

Leaving Gangi the trail descends through mixed forest, steep in places to the valley floor and **Deordi** (2450m), the highest village in the valley. The trail follows the **Bhilan Ganga** for a further 2km to the meadows of **Kalyani**. Here the trail splits, with the upper trail winding up to **Shastru Tal**.

This trek takes the lower trail along the riverbank. It is well marked, through rhododendron and spruce forest. This section of the trail is particularly vulnerable to landslides and may involve an occasional tiring diversion where the **Bhilan Ganga** has swept away the existing track. The meadow of **Kharsoli** (2890m) is a great campsite, just beyond the confluence of the substantial side river flowing into the Bhilan Ganga.

Day 4: Kharsoli to Khatling Cave

4–5 hours, 13km

The trek ascends through mixed forest, across alpine meadows and past shepherd encampments to gain dramatic views of the peaks including Thalay Sagar (6904m) and snow ridges that rise above the Khatling Glacier. Views also extend to the alpine ridges leading to Marsar Tal and the wealth of possibilities in the upper Bhilan Ganga Valley.

Leaving Kharsoli the trail follows the river before entering a forest of oak, spruce and silver birch. The impressive waterfalls on the opposite side of the valley provide an additional attraction on the 3km to 4km trek to the shepherd's encampment at **Bhelbagi** (3100m). Here, the local villagers graze their sheep, goats and cattle during summer.

From Bhelbagi the trail winds past stands of silver birch. A steep ascent leads across a scree slope to another encampment, **Tambakund**. The time from Kharsoli is around three hours.

From the open meadow at Tambakund, the trail winds through alpine meadow, juniper and silver birch to the **Khatling Cave** (3650m). There is a sheltered campsite a few minutes beyond the cave, although the porters tend to favour staying in the cave.

Day 5: Khatling Cave to Khatling Glacier & Chobia

6 hours, 17km

This can be a tiring day. However, savour the impressive mountain panorama above the Khatling Glacier that includes many 6000m peaks that practically enclose the upper valley. Rather than returning back to the Khatling Cave, continue to the beautiful meadow at Chobia with time to complete an exhilarating side trip to Marsar Tal.

From **Khatling Cave** the trail descends steeply to the riverbank before gradually winding up through boulder and scree slopes alongside the **Bhilan Ganga**. The trail remains on the true right of the river for around 3km before reaching a wide glacial fan extending from the terminal moraine of the **Khatling Glacier**. The walking is easier from here to **Zero Point** (3710m), where the river emerges from the glacier.

To reach Chobia, cross the river flowing from the Khatling Glacier to reach the true left of the valley. One option is to climb above Zero Point and traverse across the snout of the glacier. This takes at least two hours. The alternative is to select a place to cross the braided river, which will mean getting your boots wet.

Once on the true left of the valley, head towards the terminal moraine of the **Phatling Glacier**. There is no trail across the moraine and a short steep ascent is necessary before descending to **Chobia** (3400m). This alpine meadow has many good campsites and is ideal for a rest day or two. Consequently it is reasonably popular so it's possible you may have company if you do stop. It is also a convenient base for the side trip to Marsar Tal.

SIDE TRIP: MARSAR TAL

8 hours, 19km return

From **Chobia**, cross the stream flowing from the east and ascend the alpine ridges on the true left of the valley. Follow the ill-defined shepherds trail (steep in places) across boulder fields; be prepared for the occasional rock scramble. The views are magnificent: across the upper sections of the **Khatling Glacier** and towards the high pass – the **Auden Col** (5400m) – leading to Gangotri. The Jogin peaks are in view, as is **Jaonli** (6630m). **Thalay Sagar** (6361m), **Kirti Stambh** (6270m) and **Bharte Khunta** (6578m) rise above the **Phatling Glacier**.

The last 2km leads across high alpine pastures and scree slopes to the serene waters of Marsar Tal (4590m), which is frozen until at least mid-June. Retrace the outward route back to Chobia.

The ridge immediately to the east of Marsar Tal defines the route to Vasuki Tal and Kedarnath. It is a demanding one-day traverse to Vasuki Tal and a further day to **Kedarnath**, with time to follow the pilgrim trail to the trailhead at **Gaurikund**.

Days 6 & 7: Chobia to Ghuttu

3 days, 52km

Allow three days to return to Ghuttu. The first day, trek back down the valley to **Kharsoli**. On the following day aim as far as **Nerlan** or even **Reeh**, leaving a short day to **Ghuttu** on the third day.

HEM KUND & VALLEY OF THE FLOWERS

Duration 4 days
Distance 56km
Difficulty easy
Start/Finish Govind Ghat
Nearest Town Joshimath
Transport bus/shared taxi
Summary Follow the Sikh pilgrims to the sacred Hem Kund and take day walks to the renowned Bhyundar Valley – the Valley of the Flowers.

Thousands of Sikh pilgrims trek this route each year, while the Valley of the Flowers has been an attraction for botanists worldwide ever since it was 'discovered' in 1931. The trail to the Valley of the Flowers branches off the main pilgrim trail just beyond Ghangaria. Camping in the national park is not permitted, so each night you need to return to Ghangaria.

While the well-defined trails suit the novice trekker, acclimatisation is a major problem, particularly as most ascend to Hem Kund (4330m) within a day of leaving Govind Ghat (1830m). Few pilgrims would return to Govind Ghat without at least getting a mild case of altitude sickness.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trail is open from May until mid-October. In May the upper stages of the trek will be under snow, while the monsoon rain falls in July and August.

In spring, visit the Valley of the Flowers as soon as the winter snows melt in May. The wildflowers are best in July and August. Unfortunately, this is also when the mountain roads to Joshimath and Govind Ghat are subject to landslides.

What to Bring

It is not necessary to bring a tent, stove and cooking equipment if you intend to stay in one of the many hotels in Ghangaria. There are also *dhabas* on every twist and turn of the trail so there is no need to bring food, except snacks for day walks in the Bhyundar Valley.

Permits & Regulations

A permit is needed to visit the Valley of the Flowers. It is purchased from the Forest Office just above Ghangaria. A three-day permit for foreign trekkers is Rs 350, Indian trekkers Rs 50 per day.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 8 Pindari Glacier, Badrinath & Nanda Devi*. Also refer to the Survey of India Trekking map series 1:250,000 *Badri–Kedar*. The US Military U502 series 1:250,000 *NI 44-6 ref Nanda Devi* covers the route. You may also consult the SFAR 1:150,000 series *Garhwal Himalaya* but you will need both the east and west sections.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

There are regular buses between Joshimath and Govind Ghat (Rs 20, one hour). Shared taxis are Rs 40 per person. From Joshimath, most buses continue to Badrinath.

THE TREK (see map p147–9)

Day 1: Govind Ghat to Ghangaria

5–6 hours, 14km

The steady stream of pilgrims, particularly in May and June, provides a sense of camaraderie on the well-defined trail that winds past villages and through mixed forest to the bustling complex at Ghangarai. Glimpses of Hathi Parbat (6727m) and Ghori Parbat (6708m) rising over 4500m above the trail provide a reminder that we are approaching the high Himalaya.

Govind Ghat (1830m), on the true right bank of the Alaknanda River, has hotels, *dhabas*, pilgrim shelters and ritual bathing areas, along with vendors selling colourful bangles and combs.

Cross the suspension bridge over the **Alaknanda River** and commence the ascent on the concrete path for 4km to the village of **Pulana** (2100m). Continue along the well-defined trail that leads high above the valley through a forest of oak, rhododendron, spruce and silver fir before winding down to the bridge over the **Laxman Ganga**. On the final 3km the trail ascends steeply in places through the forest before gradually winding across the meadows to Ghangaria.

Ghangaria (Govind Dham; 3050m) is a large pilgrim complex, including a **g**urdwara (Sikh temple), lodges and a **GMVN Rest House** (dm/d Rs 190/950). There are also many **private lodges** (r Rs 200-600).The more impeccably dressed pilgrim may like to visit the village tailor and drycleaner.

There is a dearth of campsites. The best chance of savouring some tranquillity is to head down to the meadow in the vicinity of the helicopter pad, although regular flights during the day make this less peaceful than a few years ago.

Day 2: Hem Kund Return

5–6 hours, 14km return

After the long journey from the Punjab, this is the ultimate day for many Sikh pilgrims. For most the altitude takes its toll on the 1300m ascent. Yet the exhilaration of reaching Hem Kund (or Lokpal) is more than sufficient motivation for most. The lake was 'discovered' in 1930 by a teacher from a Sikh religious centre who set out to identify where the Sikh guru Gobind Singh meditated in a former life. The description of the locality in the Sikh holy book Dasam Granth fits Hem Kund – a remote lake surrounded by seven snow-capped peaks.

Cross the bridge above **Ghangaria** over the **Laxman Ganga**. The trail ascends steeply at first before crossing a series of meadows to the stands of silver birch marking the upper treeline at around 3500m. The trail is well-defined and after each major switchback there is a *dhaba* serving tea and snacks. While resting, the views back down to Ghangaria and across to the peaks above the entrance to the Bhyundar Valley provide suitable encouragement on your progress to the lake.

While the stone steps that mark the final 300m to Hem Kund may appear inviting, they are considerably more tiring than the long and gradual switchbacks followed by the horse attendants.

On arrival at **Hem Kund** (4330m), most pilgrims wash themselves in the icy waters of the lake before visiting the gurdwara, built around 30 years ago.

The return to Ghangaria is by the same route. The exhilaration of visiting the lake, together with heading downhill, ensures that most pilgrims are back at Ghangaria within a couple of hours.

VALLEY OF THE FLOWERS

Frank Smythe first brought the Bhyundar Valley to the attention of mountain enthusiasts and botanists in 1931 after a successful climb on Kamet. The team crossed the Bhyundar Pass in the lashing rain and mist, intent on forging a new route through the mountains back to Joshimath. As they descended into the shelter of the valley, the clouds lifted and revealed alpine meadows carpeted with wildflowers. They were greeted with the sight of primula, saxifrage, red potentillas, geraniums, asters, gentians, anemones, delphiniums, blue corydalis and wild roses. Indeed, the many hundreds of flowering species lead Smythe to refer to the Bhyundar Valley as the Valley of the Flowers.

While Smythe was justifiably enthusiastic about the great range of flowers he saw, it is a matter of debate as to whether the Bhyundar Valley is the best place for appreciating Uttarakhand's wildflowers. There are many *bugyals* (high-altitude meadows) that are equally as attractive. These include the *bugyals* en route to the Kuari Pass, and the meadows above Dodi Tal and in the vicinity of the Khatling Glacier. The alpine meadows beneath the Rupin Pass or those in the upper Har ki Dun Valley are also worthy of a visit.

Wherever you choose, bring a copy of Polunin and Stainton's *Flowers of the Himalaya*. Reprints of Frank Smythe's *The Valley of the Flowers* are available in Delhi.

Day 3: Valley of the Flowers Return

5–6 hours, 14km return

The trek to the fabled Valley of the Flowers is high on the wish list for many trekkers. It is not hard to understand why (see boxed text above). The secluded valley carpeted with wildflowers and enclosed by high mountains never fails to impress.

From Ghangaria, recross the bridge over the Hem Ganga and commence the climb to the entrance of the Bhyundar Valley. About 2km beyond the Forest Office checkpoint, the trail crosses the stream flowing from the Bhyundar Valley and continues on the true right. The 5km climb is more gradual than the one to Hem Kund. On the ascent, the trail enters a gorge before the valley widens. There is a permanent snow bridge over one of the larger side streams. This marks the entrance to the valley (3850m).

The **Bhyundar Valley** is a glacial valley about 10km long and 2km wide, at an altitude of between 3650m and 3950m. It is characterised by alpine glades, silver birch trees and rhododendrons, and is enclosed by **Nar Parbat** (5855m), **Nilgiri Parbat** (6474m), **Rataban** (6166m) and **Ghori Parbat** (6708m).

Well-marked trails lead to meadows supporting a profusion of wildflowers. Plan to spend at least three days appreciating the multitude of species even though it will necessitate making the trek up from Ghangaria each day. Since 1983, grazing has been banned in the park, and there is debate about the (detrimental) effect on the variety of wildflowers.

Return to Ghangaria via the same route.

Day 4: Ghangaria to Govind Ghat

5 hours, 14km

The return trek to **Govind Ghat** can be completed in a morning, allowing time to return to **Joshimath** the same day.

KUARI PASS

Duration 6 days
Distance 82km
Difficulty moderate
Start Auli
Finish Ghat
Nearest Towns Joshimath, Nandprayag
Transport bus/shared taxi
Summary Ascend the alpine meadows to the Kuari Pass and gain unrivalled views of the Himalaya and Zanskar Ranges before continuing through mixed forest and traditional Hindu villages.

Although the Kuari Pass (3640m) is not high by Himalayan standards, the views surpass expectations, extending east to the peaks in the vicinity of Nanda Devi, while to the north the 7000m summits define the border between India and Tibet.

To reach the pass allow at least one extra day for acclimatisation. Beyond the pass, look forward to following trails through mixed forest and farming villages in the relatively isolated Brithi Valley. The trek can also be extended to Rup Kund (see p171) for an exhilarating 10- to 12-day adventure.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trail can normally be followed from mid-May until late October, although expect residual snow on the upper sections early in the season. Mid-September to mid-October is an ideal time to trek.

What to Bring

A tent, stove and cooking gear are necessary, as are food supplies for the whole trek.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 8 Pindari Glacier, Badrinath & Nanda Devi*. Also refer to the Survey of India Trekking map series 1:250,000 *Badri–Kedar*. The US Military U502 series 1:250,000 *NI 44-6 ref Nanda Devi* includes most of the trek. The SFAR 1:150,000 *Garhwal Himalaya (West Section)* includes only the days up to and near the Kuari Pass.

Permits & Regulations

A trekking permit is necessary to enter this outer region of the Nanda Devi National Park. The permits are issued at the Forest Office just above Joshimath on the road to Auli. For foreign trekkers the fee is Rs 350 for the first three days then Rs 175 per additional day, Indian trekkers Rs 50 per day for the first three days and then Rs 25 per day. There is also a charge for staff accompanying your trek of Rs 50 per day for the first three days and Rs 25 thereafter plus a charge of Rs 25 per mule. Add to that a camping charge of Rs 50 per night and Rs 100 per night if your agent provides a cook tent or mess tent. To ensure the 'user pays' policy extends down the trail, an additional camping fee of Rs 100 is collected by the shepherds at Sutoli and the villagers at Jhangi and Ramni.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

From Ghat, there are shared 4WDs to Nandprayag (Rs 30, one to 1½ hours). From Joshimath there is a regular shared-taxi

NANDA DEVI SANCTUARY

Nanda Devi (7816m) is the highest peak completely within India. It is surrounded by a huge circle of mountain walls with only one outlet, where the Rishi Ganga forges a route through deep, almost impenetrable gorges before flowing into the Alaknanda River. Given these natural defences, it was not until 1934 that the first mountaineers were finally able to reach the base of Nanda Devi.

In the 1830s GW Traill, the first Commissioner of Kumaon, explored the glacial systems to the south and east of the sanctuary. He ascended the Pindari Glacier and crossed the Pindari Kanda (known also as Traill's Pass) to the Gori Ganga. However, neither he nor later parties attempted to enter the sanctuary.

In 1883 WW Graham attempted a route following the course of the Rishi Ganga. The small expedition managed to make its way over the Dharansi Pass (4667m) before heading down the slippery slopes to the Rishi Ganga. Here they discovered that there were two sanctuaries: inner and outer. They had reached the outer sanctuary, with access to the north up the Ramani Glacier to Changabang and Dunagiri, while to the south a huge glacier flowed from the base of Trisul. However, the inner sanctuary and the base of Nanda Devi were further up the Rishi Ganga through a formidable gorge.

In 1905 the British mountaineer Dr GT Longstaff explored a possible route to the east of the sanctuary, climbing a pass (the Longstaff Col) south of Nanda Devi East (7434m). This route proved to be unfeasible, with steep ice cliffs falling away into the inner sanctuary. Longstaff returned in May 1907. This time he followed the route over the Dharansi Pass but was defeated by the spring snow. Undeterred, the small party headed north to the Bagini Glacier and over the Bagini Pass (6128m), a high pass between Dunagiri and Changabang. The party then descended the Ramani Glacier to the Rishi Ganga, to the point reached by WW Graham's party in 1883. Faced with the same difficulty of

service to Auli (Rs 15, one hour). From Nandprayag, regular buses go to Srinagar and Dehra Dun. For the porters, the last bus to Joshimath departs around 4pm.

THE TREK (see map p147–9)

Day 1: Auli to Chitra Kantha

6–7 hours, 15km

After the long journey from Delhi this stage will not disappoint. The views from Auli include some of the most impressive in this region of the Himalaya including Nanda Devi at the head of the Rishi Ganga as well as the host of peaks that form an outer rim of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary.

Auli (2750m) has developed into a thriving ski resort with a chair lift to the higher meadows. It has a GMVN Rest House. The initial stage of the trek heads up the hillside and beyond the chair lift before reaching a small oak and holly forest after 1½ hours. A small temple is passed just below Gurson Bugyal.

The trail winds across **Gurson Bugyal** for 4km before ascending to a vantage point with a bird's-eye view of the classic route up **Rishi Ganga** into the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. The trail then rounds the contours before a descent to a small lake (3260m) and a Gujar shepherd encampment. In places, the trail is exposed and care should be taken, especially in wet weather. When in doubt take the more circuitous route followed by the mule attendants. In spite of its idyllic setting there is no fresh outflow from the lake so there is no option but to continue through a hemlock, oak and rhododendron forest for 3km before a short descent to the meadow and campsite at **Chitra Kantha** (3310m).

The impressive snow-capped ridge, including **Chaukhamba 1** (7138m), can be seen beyond Joshimath.

The shepherds living between here and the Kuari Pass are from Rishikesh or Haridwar and graze flocks of sheep and goats throughout summer. There is a small spring line at the head of the meadow for replenishing your water supply.

Day 2: Chitra Kantha to Kuari Pass

2½–3 hours, 9km

The views from the Kuari Pass are often cited as the best in the Indian Himalaya. It is not hard to discover why. To the north is the Chaukhamba Range, while the summits

finding a route up the Rishi Gorge, the party explored the outer sanctuary. Longstaff made the first ascent of Trisul (7120m) later that season.

In 1932 Hugh Ruttledge attempted to reach the inner sanctuary via a pass at the head of the Sunderdhunga Glacier. He was unsuccessful, with reports of a huge 3000m ice wall at the head of the glacier.

In 1934 HW Tilman and Eric Shipton, together with three Sherpas, attempted the route up the Rishi Ganga. They forged through the Rishi Gorge to become the first party to enter the inner sanctuary and reach the base of Nanda Devi. Later that season they returned to source a climbing route up Nanda Devi before heading south over the Sunderdhunga Col and Sunderdhunga Glacier. This drew unqualified applause from the climbing circles of the day.

In 1936, while Shipton was engaged on Everest, Tilman and a group of American mountaineers made the first successful ascent of Nanda Devi, before exiting via the Longstaff Col to the Gori Ganga. In June 1939 a Polish expedition made the first ascent of Nanda Devi East (7434m), via the Longstaff Col.

It was not until the postwar years that increasing numbers of expeditions began to enter the sanctuary. The lifting of Inner Line restrictions in 1974 resulted in a large number of climbing expeditions and trekkers making their way up the Rishi Ganga. Within a few seasons the large herds of *bharal* and musk deer were forced from their natural habitat, and there was wholesale destruction of the birch trees – either cut down for bridge construction or to provide fuel for camp fires when groups returned to base camp.

Increasing environmental pressure finally led the authorities to close the sanctuary in 1983. Since then the forest guards at Lata have not permitted expeditions, or local shepherds with their flocks, inside the sanctuary. Whatever the future plans of the government, it is unlikely that the inner sanctuary will be reopened in the near future.

of Mana (7272m), Kamet (7756m) and Abl Gamin (7355m) extend to the Tibet border. In the middle foreground, a number of spectacular peaks including Dunagiri (7066m) and Changabang (6864m) enclose the Nanda Devi Sanctuary while to the west the snow-capped ranges extend to Gangotri.

Ascend the forested ridge of rhododendron, spruce and silver birch above **Chitra Kantha**. Cairns mark the track while to the south the location of the Kuari Pass can be appreciated. It takes around an hour to reach a prominent ridge top (3500m) and a further 30 minutes around to an open meadow where it meets the well-defined track from **Tapovan**. Although there is a good campsite here it is recommended to continue to the higher and more exposed camp about 500m before the **Kuari Pass** (3640m).

If time permits, trek along the adjoining ridge that heads towards the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. Here there are possible vantage points to view Nanda Devi's distinctive profile, including the twin peaks of the summit (7816m) and the east summit (7434m).

Day 3: Kuari Pass to Sutoli

5 hours, 15km

The large meadow at Sutoli can be seen from the Kuari Pass. What isn't immediately obvious is that there is some demanding trekking to get there. Occasional views to the south extending across the forested ridges to the north Indian plains compensate.

The **Kuari Pass** just a small col in a grassy ridge. The initial, steep 200m descent is difficult, especially if wet and slippery. On the true right of the gorge, the route heads past a small shepherd encampment to a clearing at **Dakwani** (3185m), suitable as a campsite. This marks the upper limit of the mixed oak and pine forest. There is a further descent to a tributary (2815m) flowing from the Kuari Pass. A short ascent followed by a long and sometimes steep descent leads to an impressive waterfall (2515m) over 1000m below the Kuari Pass. It takes the best part of two hours to complete the final haul through oak, hemlock, silver birch and rhododendron forest to the large meadow of **Sutoli** (2850m).

The shepherds from the nearby villages tend their buffalo here during summer. There are clear views back to Dakwani and the Kuari Pass, while the tips of the peaks beyond Joshimath peep above the ridge to the west of the valley.

Day 4: Sutoli to Jhangi

4½–5 hours 13km

The villages and well-tended fields of the Brithi Valley are an attractive dimension to the trek. The forested ridges extending to the peaks and glaciers at the head of the valley including Nanda Ghunti (6309m) on an outer rim of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary provide a sense of scale in this remote corner of the Garhwal.

From Sutoli, the trail heads up to a **ridge** (2950m) from where there are views that extend across the Brithi Valley and all the way down for nearly 1200m to the **Brithi Ganga**. Initially there is a gradual descent to the prosperous village of **Pana** (2450m) with its slate-roofed houses and its corn, maize and mustard fields. After the village, the trail crosses a small tributary by a concrete bridge. The trail splits 1km beyond here: the upper route leads to **Irani** village, the district headquarters; the lower trail goes direct to Jhangi. The descent to the Brithi Ganga is steep, steamy and slippery in places with bamboo, tropical undergrowth that forms the habitat for the occasional troop of langurs. Cross the large suspension bridge over the river before a 200m ascent to Jhangi.

Jhangi (2000m) is a small village at the entrance to the upper Brithi Valley. There is a well-maintained Forest Rest House immediately above the village while the campsite is located about 100m higher, close to the forest.

Day 5: Jhangi to Ramni

5–6 hours, 16km

This trek through mixed forest has vantage points to the upper Brithi Valley before crossing to the Nandakini Valley with its grand views that extend to the alpine meadows and the snow-capped peaks including Trisul (7120m).

From Jhangi climb for 450m through the forest to a small clearing. The trail then rounds the contours of the hillside through oak and rhododendron forest to a second meadow. There is a further ascent to the third and highest meadow (2900m) before a tiring 100m haul up to a ridge (3020m)

that defines the watershed between the Brithi Ganga and the Nandakini Valleys. The time from Jhangi village to the ridge is about four hours.

A gradual descent leads through holly oak forest and verdant glades where villagers from Ramni graze their animals in summer. About 2km below the pass the trail splits. The lower trail (on the true left) heads down to **Gorli** village and the route to Wan and Rup Kund (see below). The upper trail (on the true right) leads directly down to Ramni.

Ramni (2550m) is a large, prosperous village with a few stores serving the outlying villages, some *dhabas* and a couple of **lodges** (around Rs 200).

Day 6: Ramni to Ghat

4–5 hours, 14km

Savour further views of Trisul and the forested ridges of the upper Nandakani Valley before undertaking the long descent to the trailhead at Ghat.

The trail leads through the village fields and houses below **Ramni** for 4km before descending, steeply in places, through a conifer and oak forest to the Nandakini River. Remain on the true right of the valley until the bridge over the Nandakini River to the bazaar and *dhabas* at **Ghat** (1330m). There are a few guesthouses at Ghat; however, you may prefer to continue to the comfortable GMVN Rest House at **Nandprayag**, with rooms for around Rs 500, with a hot shower and an obliging *chowkidar* who can prepare meals.

RUP KUND

Duration 8 days
Distance 113km
Difficulty moderate
Start Ghat
Finish Loharjang
Nearest Town Nandprayag
Transport bus/shared taxi
Summary Trek through traditional Hindu villages and ascend mixed forest and alpine meadows to the mysterious lake of Rup Kund.

It would be hard to match the combination of spectacular mountain views, alpine camps, secluded Hindu villages and pristine oak and rhododendron forests that are seen on this trek. There is also the sacred waters of Rup Kund that has attracted a regular stream of pilgrims for many generations.

There is the option of shortening the trek by taking a taxi up the newly constructed road to Kunol (Day 3), although extra time should be reserved for acclimatisation. There is also a dirt road as far as Wan, although it will be some time before it is linked to Kunol. This trek can be combined with the Kuari Pass trek (p167).

PLANNING

When to Trek

The higher stages of the trek to Rup Kund are under deep snow until early June. Even in June there is likely to be considerable snow above Bedni Bugyal. The ideal time to trek is from mid-September until mid-October.

What to Bring

Carry a tent, stove, cooking gear and food for at least two or three days. It is possible to get by without a tent, providing you are prepared to stay in very basic huts on the higher stages of the trek.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 8 Pindari Glacier, Badrinath & Nanda Devi*. Also refer to the Survey of India Trekking map series 1:250,000 *Badri–Kedar*. The US Military U502 series 1:250,000 NI *44-6 ref Nanda Devi* covers the sections between Ramni and Rup Kund.

Permits & Regulations

As with the Kuari Pass trek, a permit is necessary to enter the outer region of the Nanda Devi National Park. The permits are issued at the Forest Office at Nandaprayag. For foreign trekkers the fee is R 350 for the first three days then Rs 175 per additional day, Indian trekkers Rs 50 per day for the first three days and then Rs 25 per day. There is also a charge for staff accompanying your trek of Rs 50 per day for the first three days and Rs 25 thereafter plus a charge of Rs 25 per mule. Add to that a camping charge of Rs 50 per night and Rs 100 if your agent provides a cook tent or mess tent. Add to that a surcharge of Rs 100 per tent if camping near a village. If the Forest Office is closed then you can

obtain the permit from the Forest Officer at Bedni Bugyal.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

From Nandprayag, shared taxis are available on a per-seat basis to Ghat (Rs 50, one to 1½ hours). Regular buses go to Nandprayag from Joshimath, Srinagar and Dehra Dun.

There is a bus from Mundoli to Debal (Rs 40, two hours). Shared taxis are also available (Rs 50). From Debal, there are buses to Karnaprayag, with connections to Srinagar and Dehra Dun. There is also a direct overnight bus to Delhi (Rs 380).

Alternatively, take the local bus to Tharali and catch an onward bus via Gwaldam to Almora (Rs 110, seven to eight hours). From Almora, many buses go to Naini Tal and overnight buses head direct to Delhi.

THE TREK (see map p148–9)

Day 1: Ghat to Ramni/Gorli

7 hours, 15km

The ascent from Ghat affords the first views of the upper Nandakini Valley and an initial perspective of the route leading to Rup Kund.

From Ghat (1330m) it's a long way up to Ramni. Cross the bridge over the **Nandakini River** and follow the bank of the river for 4km before commencing the ascent. The well-defined trail through conifer forest is steep in places before crossing a small ridge, the Bota Khal, leading to the fields and houses below **Ramni** (2550m) if staying at one of the lodges. Ramni is a large, prosperous village with a few stores serving the outlying villages, some *dhabas* and a couple of lodges (around Rs 200). If camping, divert up the Nandakini Valley for 2km to (2580m) to a comfortable campsite just above the village.

Day 2: Ramni/Gorli to Sutol

7 hours, 18km

This is a relatively long day following trails through villages set beneath the forests and alpine glades of the upper reaches of the Nandakini Valley that gradually extend to the moraine and snowfields below Trisul. This stage could be split by camping at Pehri, allowing more time to adjust to the pace of the farming communities as you head to Sutol the next day.

From **Gorli** an established trail leads high above the river along the true right of the Nandakini Valley. **Ala** (2120m) is the first of a number of well-maintained and hospitable villages. Some of the more prosperous houses have commissioned ornate woodcarvings above their doors, including statues of Ganesh (the elephant-headed god). From Ala, the trail gradually climbs through conifer forest before a short descent to **Pehri** (1940m) where there is a campsite.

There is a steep ascent for 300m to a ridge that leads around to **Panjachawk** (2280m) before another descent to a **tributary** flowing from **Hom Kund**. The final stage for the day includes a gradual climb up through rhododendron and blue-pine forest to a vantage point from where Sutol can be seen nestled in the forests in the upper Nandakani Valley. It is less than an hour to **Sutol** (2200m) where there is a choice to stay at one of the basic lodges, or camp alongside the Nandakini River.

Day 3: Sutol to Wan

5 hours, 17km

The day includes a steady ascent through spruce and oak forests before winding through idyllic meadows to the ridge dividing the Nandakani and Wan valleys. En route take in tantalising views of Trisul as well as the forested ridges that stretch south to the foothills over 1500m below.

From **Sutol** the trail ascends to Kunol. Steep in places, the trail is lined with orchids and luxuriant ferns, as it winds through one of the finest mixed forests in Garhwal. Barking deer have been seen in the forest clearing, while the heavy, spiked collars worn by the shepherd dogs indicate the need for protection from leopards. There are also views of the summit of Trisul that looms way above the forest canopy.

After two hours or around 5km, the trail splits. Follow the higher trail that leads through open meadows to the outlying fields of **Kunol** (2600m). This is also the trailhead for the dirt road from Ghat. It will take a further 1½ hours along a paved stone trail through rhododendron forest to the ridge (2950m) dividing the Nandakini and Wan Valleys. The trail down to **Wan** (2540m) can be completed in 1½ hours

although it is not necessary to go all the way down to the village. There is a Forest Rest House about 100m above Wan, and a **GMVN Rest House** (dm/d Rs 100/500) with perfectly manicured lawns and beds of dalais and chrysanthemum that create a feeling of being in an English country garden. There are camping spots in the vicinity, while the **village temple** is just above the Forest Rest House.

Day 4: Wan to Bedni Bugyal

4–5 hours, 11km

The demanding ascent to Bedni Bugyal is followed by many hundreds of villagers during the annual pilgrimage to the sacred lake of Rup Kund. The alpine camp at Bedni Bugyal will impress devotees and trekkers alike. The effort is worth it. The views from the alpine camp extend west across the main Himalaya Range as far as Gangotri, while the peaks of Trisul and Nanda Ghunti provide an awesome backdrop.

From the Forest Rest House at Wan, follow the trail down the valley for 1km. Here the trails diverge, with the upper trail leading to Bedni Bugyal. Ascend this trail for 2km to a ridge (2650m) and a small temple with views of Trisul at the head of the valley.

There is a short 150m descent to a small tributary, before the long ascent to Bedni Bugyal. The trail through the forest is steep in places. Jungle cats climbing the tallest oak trees are common here. Oaks persist to around 3000m, and the pines and rhododendrons thin out at 3200m. This marks the upper limit of the forest, as there are no silver birch trees in this region of Garhwal. The 800m climb through the forest takes around three hours with a spring line and small clearing at around 3000m. Once beyond the treeline it is a further 3km across the meadows to **Bedni Bugyal** (3350m).

Just above the meadow is an ancient **temple** where pilgrims make their offerings en route to Rup Kund. There are a few basic huts for shelter nearby.

Day 5: Bedni Bugyal to Bhugu Basa

4–5 hours, 10km

The ascent affords further views of the high peaks of the Garhwal while the ancient pilgrim trail and small temples en route reflect the commitment of many generations of pilgrims willing to brave the elements to reach Rup Kund.

From **Bedni Bugyal** there is a gradual climb up and along the northeast ridge towards Trisul. After one to 1½ hours, the trail reaches a **cairn** (3800m) overlooking Bedni Bugyal. To the north, uninterrupted views of Trisul and Nanda Ghunti can be appreciated. Here, the trail splits: a route to the west leads eventually down to Sutol, while the higher trail heads north towards Rup Kund.

The Rup Kund trail follows the contours for about 3km before becoming progressively steeper to a second ridge and a small temple. This ridge is an extension of the one crossed between Sutol and Wan, and marks the divide between the catchments of the Bedni Ganga and the Nandakini River. Make an offering at the entrance to the temple before the gradual descent to Bhugu Basa.

Compared to the beauty of Bedni Bugyal, it is hard to imagine a more desolate, boulder-strewn campsite than that of **Bhugu Basa** (4100m). It is exposed to icy northern winds that whip around the stone shelter huts. If you choose to stay in the small, sheltered **ca**mpsite about 500m beyond the huts, you'll need to retrace your steps to the limited water supply.

Day 6: Bhugu Basa to Rup Kund & Return to Bedni Bugyal

7–8 hours, 18km

This is a big day that includes the climb to Rup Kund before returning to the alpine meadows of Bedni Bugyal. Rup Kund is under snow for up to 10 months of each year so it is only in mid-summer when the snows melt that the human bones at the bottom of the lake can be seen. Yet even when under snow there are stunning views that extend way beyond Bedni Bugyal.

It takes around three hours to ascend to **Rup Kund** (4550m). The trail crosses moraine fields and includes a climb over a rocky section that can be tricky when under snow before the final push to the rim above the lake. The sight of the colourful prayer flags comes as a welcome relief before negotiating the descent to the lake.

From Rup Kund, it takes about two hours to return to **Bhugu Basa** and a further 2½ to three hours back to **Bedni Bugyal**.

SIDE TRIP: JYURI GALI TO HOM KUND

7–8 hours, 12km return

From Rup Kund, the onward climb to the pass of **Jyuri Gali** (4620m) is steep and requires a few handholds in places. The pass offers superb views of Trisul and **Nanda Ghunti**. It also marks the divide between the headwaters of Rup Kund and Hom Kund, the main sources of the Nandakini River. **Hom Kund** (4060m) is on the far side of the opposite valley. The trek takes three to four hours one way. Return via the same route.

Day 7: Bedni Bugyal to Didana

4 hours, 11km

The final day at altitude provides further opportunities to savour the magnificent views of the Garhwal Himalaya. More often than not, the mist-filled valleys create a feeling of being 'above the clouds' while trekking across the vast alpine meadows that glisten in the early morning sunlight.

Follow the trail to the south of **Bedni Bugyal** and cross the alpine grazing meadows of **Ali Bugyal** (3300m) for 4km to 5km. The trail splits on more than one occasion and a shepherd may have to point you in the right direction. At the south extremity of Ali Bugyal, commence a steep two-hour descent through forest and occasional clearing to an open meadow (2550m) just above the picturesque village of **Didana**.

Day 8: Didana to Loharjang

3–4 hours, 13km

This is a short stage to appreciate the oak and bamboo forests and villages of the Wan Valley before heading down the dirt road to Loharjang.

Descend the stone path leading through **Didana** (2450m). Halfway through the village the trail splits. Be sure to take the trail leading to the true right even though it appears to be the minor trail. It may of some consolation to know the author decided to take the alternative trail that gradually petered out on high cliffs above the Bedni Ganga. The only compensation when retracing his footsteps was seeing a pair of pine martins in the forest thicket.

For those electing not follow in the author's footsteps it should take less than an hour from camp through Didana to the substantial bridge over the **Bedni River** (2200m). It's then a short, hot climb to the dirt road linking Wan to Loharjang. There is little traffic, so factor in walking the last 7km to the ridge-top village and welcome *dhabas* and **GMVN Rest House** (dm/d Rs 100/500) at **Loharjang** (2130m).

RUP KUND

The human bones at the bottom of the Rup Kund have been a particular source of interest. Many theories have been advanced – some more fanciful than others. The most likely it that they are the remains of a party of pilgrims trapped by bad weather in the 14th century. Whatever the truth, the location of the lake beneath the huge ramparts of Nanda Ghunti and Trisul would have captured the pilgrim's imagination for many centuries. For further background on the pilgrimage and the legends in this region of Garhwal, refer to William Sax's *Mountain Goddess*.

KUMAON

Trekkers often overlook the Kumaon region, close to the border of western Nepal. This is not surprising as it takes at least two long days of driving from Delhi to get to the trailhead. Yet the treks compare favourably with those out of the more popular hill resorts elsewhere in the Indian Himalaya.

The hill station of Naini Tal is a convenient centre for trekkers, before travelling to the trailheads at Loharket for a trek to the Pindari Glacier, or to Munsyari and the trails leading to Milam and the Nanda Devi East base camp.

HISTORY

Kumaon's history can be traced to the Chand dynasty that united many of the small hill states in the 16th century. The unification of the region became particularly apparent during the time of the Moghuls, when the various rajahs paid tribute to the Moghul court and, in return, were able to maintain a semblance of independence.

In 1790, Chand kingdoms, together with the Garhwal, were attacked by the Gurkhas. When the local rajahs asked the British to

intervene, the East India army fought a number of wars with the Gurkhas, resulting in the Treaty of Siliguri in 1817. This treaty brought Nepal's western borders back to the Kali River. The British were anxious to exercise their authority and established direct rule over the Kumaon, including the districts of Almora and Naini Tal. Hill stations were built to accommodate the British officials, notably at Naini Tal and Ranikhet.

In 1947, after India's independence, the region became part of the state of Uttar Pradesh. In 1968 the Kumaon region, including Almora, Naini Tal and Pithoragarh, was administered from Naini Tal.

ENVIRONMENT

Nanda Devi (7816m) – the highest peak in India – defines the northern boundary between the Garhwal and Kumaon. Significant peaks to the south include Nanda Ghunti (6309m), Trisul I (7120m), Devtoli (6788m) and Nanda Kot (6861m). Northeast of Nanda Devi, the Himalaya is defined by many more impressive peaks, including Hardeol (7151m), Tirsuli I (7074m) and Rishi Pahar (6992m), which enclose the Milam Glacier.

Southeast of Nanda Devi is the Panch Chuli Range (6904m), which forms the mountain divide between the Gauri Ganga and the Kali River – the border between India and Nepal.

Wildlife sightings in Kumaon are similar to the Garhwal: black bear, forest leopards, serow, Himalayan thar and musk deer. Snow leopards and *bharal* are found on the outlying ridges of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary.

Wildflower enthusiasts will not be disappointed with the alpine meadows close to the Himalaya Range, while the upper Milam Valley is particularly attractive in July and August.

Many of the birds found in Kumaon are also found in western Nepal. They range from brightly coloured bulbuls, flycatchers and babblers in the lower foothills, to the pheasants found in the upper forests, to kestrels, lammergeiers and golden eagles across the high-alpine pastures.

ACCESS TOWN

Many trekkers spend a day or two in Naini Tal (p184), taking a break from Delhi and the oppressive heat of the Indian Plains before undertaking one of the treks in the Kumaon. Full details of Naini Tal (p184) and Munsyari (p183) are included at the end of the chapter.

PINDARI GLACIER

Duration 6 days
Distance 89km
Difficulty easy
Start/Finish Loharket
Nearest Town Naini Tal
Transport bus/shared taxi
Summary One of the most popular treks in Uttarakhand; ascend through Hindu villages, mixed forests and open meadows to view the peaks and passes above the Pindari Glacier.

This trek offers well-defined trails with only one minor pass crossing en route to the Pindari Glacier. The views from the pass – the Dhakri Khal (2830m) – are particularly impressive and include the many snow-capped peaks that form the southern rim of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. The views from above the Pindari Glacier are also striking, particularly for the first-time trekker.

The route is very popular with Indian students during the school holidays in May and June, and many of the lodges and *dhabas* are full. However, there are very few pilgrims. This is surprising considering that the Pindari River is one of the main tributaries of the Ganges.

Acclimatisation is essential. It is recommended to spend an additional night at Dwali (2650m) before ascending to Phurkiya (3250m) and the Pindari Glacier. There is also a side trip to the nearby Sunderdhunga Glacier.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trail is open from May though October. However, if trekking in May, expect some residual snow on the final stage to the Pindari Glacier. Mid-September through October is normally clear and ideal for trekking.

What to Bring

While you can get by without them, having your own tent, stove and cooking gear gives

you the flexibility to camp in more serene settings when the huts and lodges are busy. There are private lodges *dhabas* on the trail. However, in May and June, student groups often book out the rest houses. Arrive early to ensure accommodation.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 8 (Pindari Glacier, Badrinath & Nanda Devi)*. Also refer to the Survey of India Trekking map series 1:250,000 *Kumaon Hills*. The US Military U502 series 1:250,000 *NI 44-6 ref Nanda Devi* covers the trek. The SFAR 1:150,000 *Garhwal Himalaya (East Section)* also covers the route.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

From Naini Tal, it's a long day's drive to Song and Loharket, normally requiring a change at both Almora and Bageshwar. The bus from Naini Tal to Bageshwar is (Rs 140, four hours). From Bageshwar the best option is a shared taxi. From Bageshwar to Song is (Rs 200, 1½ hours) and from Song to Loharket is (Rs 40, 30 minutes).

THE TREK (see map p148–9)

Day 1: Loharket to Dhakri

6–7 hours, 13km

This is an opportunity to savour the Himalaya Range on the first day, including the peaks of Trisul, Devtoli, Maiktoli and Nanda Khat that form the southern rim of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary; Nanda Kot can also be seen rising high above the Pindari Glacier.

From **Loharket** (1760m) the trail winds through an evergreen forest of oak and horse chestnut before ascending to the small Hindu temple at **Taladhakri** (2300m). This is the halfway point on the ascent to the Dhakri Khal. There is a campsite 1km beyond the temple (a good stopping point if you leave Loharket in the middle of the day).

Beyond Taladhakri the trail ascends across meadows and rhododendron forest that bloom by late April. The gradient lessens towards the Dhakri Khal and there is a welcome tea stall just below the pass.

Savour the impressive views from the **Dhakri Khal** (2830m) or ascend the forested ridge southwest of the pass. This leads to a series of *bugyals* where shepherds graze their flocks in summer. The one-hour ascent is well rewarded with spectacular views of the Himalaya from Joshimath to the Panch Chuli Range beyond Munsyari.

The meadow of Dhakri (2680m) lies just below the pass. There is a choice of accommodation, including the **KMVN Rest House** (Rs 80), in the centre of the meadow, with three or four other **lodges** (from Rs 200). The water supply is immediately west of the meadow, where there are alternative campsites.

Day 2: Dhakri to Dwali

6–7 hours, 16km

The village of Khati is a fine example of the traditional farming settlements in the Pindari Valley. It is a suitable vantage point to view the high peaks on the rim of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary at the head of the Sunderdhunga Valley. The day is further enhanced on the trail that leads through beautiful oak forest with tumbling waterfalls, troupes of monkeys and no end of birdlife.

The trail descends steeply in places through forest glades past a few farming settlements set amid fields of potato and barley. After 3km the trail diverts east and follows around the contours to **Khati** (2250m), the largest village in the region and the trekking-off point to the Sunderdhunga Valley (see Side Trip).

The forest trail passes a **KMVN Rest House** (Rs 80) 1km beyond Khati before winding high above the **Pindari River**. After 5km the valley widens and the trail drops down to the valley floor. There are a few tea stalls beside a well-constructed wooden bridge over the Pindari River. Cross to the true right of the valley and continue for 4km to Dwali (2650m).

Dwali (2650m) is above the confluence of the Pindari River and the river flowing from the **Kafni Glacier**. Cross the Pindari River via the wooden bridge just above the confluence of the two rivers and ascend to the **KMVN Rest House** (Rs 80). There is a campsite beside the river.

SIDE TRIP: SUNDERDHUNGA GLACIER

3 days, 54km return

From Khati, the trail heads steeply down to the **Pindari River** (2100m). There are two bridges to cross: the first over the Pindari River just above the confluence of the Pindari and Sunderdhunga Rivers; the

second over the Sunderdhunga River. The trail remains on the true right of the valley, ascending through mixed forest to the village of **Jyoti** (2450m).

Beyond Jyoti the trail winds above the river through forest and meadows to the campsite and meadow at **Katholia** (3200m), alongside the river. The following day, follow the course of the river for 7km to view the tumbling Sunderdhunga Glacier and the spectacular summit of **Maiktoli** (6803m). Return to camp at Katholia and head back to the main route the next day.

Day 3: Dwali to Phurkiya

2½–3 hours, 7km

This is a short day to assist acclimatisation before continuing to the Pindari Glacier. Tantalising views of the high peaks at the head of the valley provide an indication of the next day's highlights.

The trail from Dwali ascends steeply in places through mixed forest, past tumbling waterfalls, across snowfields (which remain until late July) and flowered meadows. The views of the peaks on the rim of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary rising high above the Pindar Valley are impressive, while the tip of Nanda Devi East can just be seen.

Phurkiya (3250m) has a **KMVN Rest House** (Rs 80) on the treeline. It is also where the valley widens to a broad U-shape that extends to the **Pindari Glacier**.

Day 4: Pindari Glacier (Zero Point) Circuit

5–6 hours, 14km

For the first-time trekker, the walk to the Pindari Glacier will exceed expectations. From Zero Point the views include the towering peaks of Nanda Khat (6611m), Changuch (6322m) and the formidable Nanda Kot (6861m) at the head of the glacier. The route up the icefall to the historic Traill's Pass (5312m) can also be appreciated. This is a technically demanding traverse leading to Martoli and the Milam Valley (see p179).

Beyond **Phurkiya** the trail gradually ascends across meadows beneath the impressive flanks of **Nanda Khat**. After the spring snowmelt, flocks of sheep and goats from the villages lower down the Pindari Valley are herded to these high pastures, where they remain until mid-September. The meadows are also particularly attractive in the monsoon when they are carpeted with wildflowers.

The main shepherd encampment is about 3km below the snout of the Pindari Glacier and is known as **Zero Point** (3650m). A **KMVN Rest House** (Rs 80) and **basic lodges** (from Rs 200) are 1km below.

From the lodges, the trail to Zero Point extends beside a lateral moraine to where the **Pindari River** emerges from the glacier. This is as far as you need to go for great views.

Days 5 & 6: Phurkiya to Loharket

2 days, 39km

The return to Loharket can be completed in two days. An early start from Phurkiya is essential to return to Dhakri the same day although some trekkers keep their sights on heading down from Zero Point to Dwali. On the following day there is ample time to reach Loharket and get a shared taxi from here or 4km down the hill to Song and continue back directly to Bageshwar.

MILAM GLACIER & NANDA DEVI

Duration 7 days

Distance 94km

Difficulty easy–moderate (with challenging options)

Start/Finish Munsyari

Public Transport bus

Summary Follow the ancient trade route from the land of the Pundits to within striking distance of Tibet.

This trek explores a remote corner of Kumaon, close to the borders of Tibet and Nepal. It follows the former trade route to the historic settlement of Milam, which in its heyday would have supported several hundred people and included a school and shops. At this time there was a thriving trade with Tibet – which ended in 1962 when the border was closed following the war between India and China. The mountain panoramas including the twin peaks of Nanda Devi, and the 7000m summits at the head of the Milam Glacier add an impressive dimension to the trek.

Options include a spectacular foray to the Nanda Devi East Base Camp as well as

a challenging alternative route that leads to the upper Ralam Valley to complete an ambitious circuit back to Munsyari.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trail is open from May to late October, although the region south of the gorge is subject to monsoon rain in July and August. Ideal trekking months are September and October.

What to Bring

Essentials include a tent, stove and cooking gear, along with food supplies for a week. There are a few lodges on the initial stages of the trek. Beyond Lilam there is nowhere to buy basic food supplies, while the settlements between Martoli and Milam are often deserted so you really have no choice but to pack and provision accordingly.

Maps

Refer to the Leomann series 1:200,000 *Sheet 8 Pindari Glacier, Badrinath & Nanda Devi*. Also refer to the Survey of India Trekking map series 1:250,000 *Kumaon Hills*. The US Military U502 series 1:250,000 *NI 44.6 ref Nanda Devi* covers the trek, as does the SFAR 1:150,000 *Garhwal Himalaya (East Section)*.

Permits & Regulations

A permit needs to be issued from the District Magistrates Office. Bring a copy of your passport. The application is processed the same day and there is no charge. The permit and your passport will be inspected at the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) checkpoints at Bodgwar and Milam.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

There is a direct bus from Almora to Munysari (Rs 200, 10 hours).

Beyond Munsyari the road is being extended towards Darkot and taxis are available to the trailhead. A seat in a shared taxi will cost around Rs 60.

THE TREK (see map p149)

Day 1: Munsyari to Lilam

3–4 hours, 8km

The time and distance covered on the first day will vary. You can hire a taxi for the 7km to 8km to the trailhead or walk out of Munsyari avoiding many of the switchbacks, although this will add a couple of hours to the day. Once underway, the villages in the Gori Ganga set in subtropical vegetation are in marked contrast to the stone settlements built to withstand heavy winter snows that are found higher up the Milam Valley.

From the main bazaar at **Munsyari** (2290m), follow the road heading northeast towards the Johar Valley. This road is at present unsealed, while an alternative trail provides some shortcuts to the trailhead just above the village of **Darkot** (1800m). From Darkot, it's a steady descent to the **Gori Ganga**. The well-defined trail follows the true right of the river past a series of small villages. Some houses are constructed of bamboo, which provides some respite from the humid summer temperatures, that reach the mid-30s (Celsius) in the pre-monsoon season. There are also several *dhabas* en route to **Lilam** (1850m).

Day 2: Lilam to Bodgwar

5–6 hours, 15km

The ascent of the Gori Ganga Gorge is a fine example of antecedent drainage as the river

LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS

There are a number of local agents in and around the main bazaar at Munsyari who can make arrangements. If following the regular itinerary to the Milam Glacier then mules are suitable. If you are considering undertaking an optional trek to the Nanda Devi Base Camp or an alternative route via the Ralam Valley then you will need to hire porters. One important consideration is the cost. Porter rates are set by the local magistrate and are calculated in terms of paraos, the local term for a trek stage. However, some paraos involve just a few hours walking. Budget for around Rs 150 per parao for carrying loads up to 20kg (although just to complicate it a bit more, some paraos are now Rs 250 per day). Add the commission to the local agent on top of this, and you can be in for an expensive trek.

echoes and thunders in an impressive series of rapids as it forges its way through the main axis of the Himalayan Range. The narrow trail is often congested as shepherds with their huge flocks of sheep and goats laden with saddle bags carrying potatoes, rice, seeds and even cement for construction head to their summer grazing pastures near Milam.

At **Lilam** the trail splits. The trail across the bridge over the **Gori Ganga** leads to the Ralam Valley while the trail we follow to Bodgwar continues on the true right of the valley high above the surging waters of the Gori Ganga. After 5km the trail passes the confluence of the Ralam River and the Gori Ganga. Above the confluence the trail enters a spectacular **gorge**. About 3km above the confluence of the rivers, the trail passes a small meadow and side stream and a welcome tea stall. Continue through conifer, chestnut and bamboo for 4km to the meadow of **Bodgwar** (2430m), nothing more than some shanty huts, an ITBP checkpoint and a PWD Rest House. For the best campsite continue for 1km past the huts to a grassy ridge close to the main river.

Day 3: Bodgwar to Martoli

6 hours, 14km

After the confines of Gori Ganga Gorge, the Milam Valley opens out affording unrivalled views of the 7000m peaks of Hardeol and Tirsuli at the head of the Milam Glacier. Further stunning mountain views are appreciated from the temple just above Martoli including the tip of Nanda Devi East (7434m) and the peak of Nanda Kot (6861m).

From Bodgwar follow the **Gori Ganga** through a further series of narrow gorges. There is a Hindu temple beneath a rock overhang 3km past Bodgwar. The trail crosses a series of snow bridges that remain in place for most of the season. Impressive waterfalls cascade down the cliff walls. The Gori Ganga Gorge begins to widen 5km later after rounding a small meadow that marks the upper limit of the gorge.

The trail then crosses open meadows extending 4km to **Railkot** (3100m). The valley turns to the north and 2km beyond Railkot the first of the high mountain peaks beyond Milam can be appreciated. At this point there is a split in the trail. Take the upper trail that heads directly to Martoli.

Martoli (3430m) is on a grassy plateau high above the confluence of the Gori Ganga and the Lwanl Gad, flowing from Nanda Devi East. Nowadays, like so many other villages in the upper Johar Valley, Martoli is practically deserted, its stone houses falling into total disrepair. Only a handful of villagers travel up the valley from Munsyari and the surrounding villages to spend the summer in Martoli or the other villages between here and Milam.

Just above Martoli there is a small stone temple dedicated to Nanda Devi with views up the Lwanl Valley. Outside the temple is an impressive row of bells hanging from climbing ropes attached to a prayer wall. The bells are donated by people going on climbing expeditions or by groups of devotees from Munsyari to placate the goddess of the high mountains.

Beyond the temple there are several acres of conifers planted by the Forest Department. Other reforestation projects are also being undertaken, as much of the surrounding hillside suffered deforestation well before the borders with Tibet were closed.

Day 4: Martoli to Milam

4 hours, 10km

This is a short stage to Milam, the last major settlement before Tibet. It was also the home of a number of the renowned Pundit explorers (see Pundits of the Johar Valley boxed text, p180). Apart from the magnificent views of the high mountains there is also a vantage point opposite the settlement of Pachhu for unrivalled views of the unmistakable profile of Nanda Devi.

From Martoli, descend steeply to the bridge over the Lwanl Gad. The trail remains on the true right or east side of the valley for a further 2km until it is opposite **Burphu** (3350m). Cross the solid wooden bridge over the **Gori Ganga**. Although the trail skirts below Burphu, it is well worth detouring up the hillside to visit the village, one of the most active in this part of the Johar Valley.

Beyond Burphu, several settlements dot the opposite side of the valley. These are only occupied by a handful of shepherds from the Munsyari district from June until late September. Continue past **Beiju**, from where it is a further 3km to **Milam** (3450m). The main settlement is just beyond the

THE PUNDITS OF THE JOHAR VALLEY

The increasing Russian presence in central Asia and Tibet in the 1860s made it necessary for the British to compile accurate surveys and gather political intelligence about the northern barriers of India and beyond, including the vast expanses of Tibet. However, there was no way that Imperial China would permit British survey officers to enter Tibet, let alone survey it. The Great Trigonometrical Survey of India Office (GTS), based in Dehra Dun, came up with the idea of training Indians who lived close to the Tibetan border – and were familiar with Tibetan customs and language – to undertake the survey work on their behalf.

The villagers of the Johar Valley fitted the bill. They had maintained trading relations with Tibet for many generations and knew the border regions well. In 1863 Nain Singh ('Chief Pundit' or 'No 1') and his cousin Mani Singh were trained in survey techniques. For two years the men were primed in the use of the sextant and the compass and taught to measure altitude by recording the temperature of boiling water. To calculate distance they were drilled to take exact steps and after every 100 steps to drop a bead in a modified Buddhist prayer wheel, which contained 100 rather than the traditional 108 beads. The prayer wheel was also modified to conceal their notes and calculations.

Nain Singh set off from Kathmandu in March 1865 disguised as a Ladakhi trader. He surveyed southern Tibet, including the Tsangpo Valley, Lhasa, Kailas and Manasorwar, before returning to Dehra Dun in June 1866. In 1867, he was commissioned to return to Tibet with Mani Singh and another Pundit, Kailan Singh (code-named 'GK'). They left India by way of Badrinath and the Mana Pass, disguised as horse traders, and wandered in near Kailas, confirming the source of the Indus and Sutlej Rivers. This notable achievement gained due recognition for the Pundits and the Survey's work both in India and in the UK.

Nain Singh's objective on his last journey in July 1874 was to survey the Tsangpo River. Setting out from Leh he crossed southern Tibet and the lower course of the Tsangpo as far as Assam, completing a journey of more than 2000km. Although he was not able to completely ascertain the lower course of the Tsangpo, it was a commendable effort.

Kishen Singh ('AK'), another of Nain Singh's cousins from the Johar Valley, also played an important role in the Survey. He embarked on his first important journey in 1872, exploring between Shigatse and the north of Lhasa. In April 1878 he returned to Tibet, travelling via Sikkim and Bhutan to Lhasa, before heading north to Mongolia. He returned south by a difficult route along the lower course of the Tsangpo, before returning to Lhasa and eventually to Darjeeling in November 1882, after his family and the Survey had given him up for dead.

A question mark still remained about whether the Tsangpo and the Brahmaputra in India were the same river. The formidable terrain between the known course of the Tsangpo and the Brahmaputra had been the subject of considerable speculation, and was the objective for a number of Pundits, including the remarkable Kinthup, from Sikkim.

Leaving Sikkim in October 1878, Kinthup undertook an epic journey through Tibet that included twice being sold into slavery. In spite of these rigours, he described the course of the Tsangpo as it rounded the huge peak of Namche Barwa (7745m) and the deep gorge country to within a short distance of the Indian foothills. However, on his return to India four years later, the lack of authentic details discredited his report. It was not until 1912, when the Tsangpo Gorge was finally explored, that Kinthup's report was finally given the recognition it deserved, just a few months before he died.

confluence of the Gori Ganga (which flows from the Milam Glacier) and the Goenka Gad, which flows from the northeast. There is a PWD Rest House at Milam.

A glance at a map will leave little doubt as to why Milam was an important trading post. A trader could reach the base of the **Unta Dhura** in a day, and after crossing the Unta Dhura, Jainta Dhura and Kangri Bingri La, be in **Tibet** the following evening.

Despite the close association the villagers of Milam have with Tibet, they are anxious not to be called Bhotia (people from Tibet). The villagers trace their ancestry to the Rajput tribes who migrated from Rajasthan in the 12th century to settle in Kumaon. In the

16th century they moved to the Munsyari region and established trading relations with Tibet. Grains, such as wheat, barley and rice were exchanged for salt, hardy Tibetan ponies and wool, until 1962.

Limited trade has resumed between Milam and Tibet, and one of the main roles for the ITBP in Milam is to prevent smuggling.

SIDE TRIP: TOWARDS THE MILAM GLACIER

2–3 hours, 6km return

Milam is as far as you are permitted to trek, although the ITBP usually turns a blind eye if you continue past the village for 3km to a vantage point (3500m) to appreciate the size and extent of the Milam Glacier. The trail passes through high meadows dotted with sage, juniper, briar roses and miniature gorse high above the terminal moraine, while *bharal* may be spotted on the meagre pastures high above the glacier. At the head of the glacier the peaks include **Rishi Pahar** (6992m), **Hardeol** (7151m) and **Tirsuli** (7074m). The peaks along the northeast rim include **Kholl** (6114m), **Nanda Gond** (6315m), **Nital Thaur** (6236m) and **Nanda Pal** (6306m).

Days 5 to 8: Milam to Munsyari

3 days, 47km

The return to Munsyari takes three days. The first day return to **Martoli** and on down to **Railkot** before a long stage all the way back down the **Gori Ganga Gorge** to **Lilam**. The final day includes the short ascent to the trailhead and the drive to **Munsyari**.

SIDE TRIP: NANDA DEVI EAST BASE CAMP

3 days, 32km

Allow a minimum of three days to trek from Milam to the Nanda Devi East Base Camp and return to Martoli. An extra day should be reserved at base camp to complete exhilarating options or to just savour the near 360-view of the mountains.

From Milam complete the walk to Martoli in a morning and continue along the true right of the Lwanl Gad that winds high above the river for 3km until it is opposite **Lwanl** (3500m). Descend to the side tributary – the Shalong Gad – cross the bridge and head up to the small deserted settlement and comfortable campsite.

On the second day the trail ascends the Lwanl Valley entering spectacular gorge country. The first 4km is often no more than a goat track crossing several exposed sections before the gorge opens out beneath the imposing peak of **Nanda Kot** (6861m). The trail gradually ascends a series of scree slopes before crossing the Lwanl River to reach a possible campsite at Naspanpati or another fine campsite at Sartok Kharak a few kilometres up the valley. Beyond Sartok Kharak the trail skirts a series of alpine ridges that seem to take forever to cross to reach the Nanda Devi Base Camp (4150m).

Nanda Devi East Base Camp (4150m) consists of a delightful series of meadows and no shortage of campsites from which to view the peaks and the high snow ridges that virtually enclose the upper valley. To the south, a snow ridge links the imposing summit of **Nanda Khat** (6611m) to **Changuch** (6322m). The lowest point on the ridge, northwest of Changuch, is **Traill's Pass** (5312m; see Pindari Glacier trek, p175). West of Traill's Pass, the snow-capped ridge merges with the one striking north from Nanda Khat before gradually rising to the imposing summit ridge below **Nanda Devi East** (7434m), the highest peak in the vicinity. Along this ridge lies the **Longstaff Col** (5910m), accessible only by a technical climb, from where it is possible to peer into Nanda Devi Sanctuary.

The return trip to **Martoli** can be completed in one long day.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: TO RALAM VALLEY VIA THE RALAM DHURA

4 days, 48km

This is a challenging alternative to the trek back down the Gori Ganga. It can be combined with the side trek to the Nanda Devi Base Camp.

If coming from Milam continue directly through **Burphu** and along the east bank of the river to the deserted settlement of **Toling** (3180m). Just below Toling the trail ascends a small side valley before winding up through rhododendron and birch groves for 1½ hours to a magnificent campsite (3700m). The remarkable views include **Nanda Devi** and a host of peaks that extend from the outer rim of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary to the 7000m peaks beyond Milam.

The second day involves a three- to four-hour gradual ascent to the **Ralam Dhura** (4570m), known locally as the Birjegani

Dhura, with more commanding views that also extend north to the peaks enclosing the upper Ralam Valley. From the pass it will take two hours to descend to the summer settlement of **Ralam** (3550m). A rest day should be included to wander up to the Ralam Glacier and view the high peaks that enclose the upper Ralam Valley.

The third day involves a five- to six-hour trek down the impressive Ralam Gorge before crossing the river to a sheltered forest camp (2310m). An early start is necessary to get to Munsyari on the final day. It includes an initial 300m ascent to a ridge above the confluence of the Ralam and Gori Ganga with sweeping views south across to Munsyari. There is a long haul down to **Pattan** (2200m) and further down to the bridge over the Gori Ganga to **Lilam**. Allow five hours to reach Lilam. Camp here for the night or continue for a further three hours to the trailhead and **Munsyari**.

TOWNS & FACILITIES

JOSHIMATH

☎ 01389 / alt 1845m / pop 13,200

Close to Nanda Devi, Joshimath has had a long association with trekking and mountaineering expeditions setting off to the Nanda Devi Sanctuary until it was closed in 1983. However, nowadays they focus on the trek to Kuari Pass and Rup Kund. Joshimath is also near Govind Ghat and the important Sikh pilgrimage to Hem Kund and the Valley of the Flowers. Thousands of Hindu pilgrims stop at Joshimath before completing the final stage of the Char Dham to Badrinath.

Information

The **GMVN Tourist Office** (☎ 222181) is in the GMVN Rest House above the main bazaar. There are several internet outlets where STD and ISD calls can also be made. There's a State Bank of India ATM and travel agencies can exchange money at a marginally discounted rate.

Supplies & Equipment

Fruit, vegetables and most food supplies are available in the market. While there are basic supplies at Auli and Govind Ghat, it is better to make your purchases in Joshimath. However, bring items such as porridge, and tinned cheese and fish from Rishikesh or Delhi.

Agents will normally only hire trekking gear when undertaking an inclusive trek. It is therefore advisable, as always, to bring your own gear, including a tent. Cooking items such as pots, pans and stoves can be purchased in the market. Cooking tents may be hired from the local agents if they are making other arrangements for you.

Trekking Agents

Agents include the following: **Eskimo Adventures** (☎ 222630; eskimoadventures @rediffmail.com) near the GMVN hotel; **Himalayan Snow Runner** (☎ 222252; www.himalayansnowrunner.com) and **Himalayan Expeditions** (☎ 941 077 8809) run by the indefatigable Kundan Singh.

Agents can organise inclusive treks from around Rs 1500 per person per day. For the Kuari Pass trek (p167), budget for around Rs 300 per mule per day.

For the Hem Kund & Valley of the Flowers trek, packhorses and porters can be organised at the trailhead at Govind Ghat. Both are at a premium in May and June so allow at least a few hours before heading off. Budget for around Rs 300 for porters per day and Rs 500 for packhorses for the day to Ghangaria, and be prepared to wait during the busy May and June season.

Sleeping & Eating

There is the **GMVN Rest House** (☎ 222118; above the main bazaar; dm/d Rs 100/570). Other places in the main bazaar include **Hotel Snow Crest** (☎ 222344; dm/d from Rs 200/700) and **Hotel Kamet** (☎ 222155; r from Rs 250).

There are many *dhabas* and restaurants in the main bazaar, including the popular Pindari restaurant.

Getting There & Away

Daily buses go to/from Rishikesh (Rs 200, 10 hours) and Haridwar (Rs 230, 12 hours). Several buses a day run to/from Badrinath (Rs 35, two hours), stopping at Govind Ghat (Rs 10, one hour). There is a shared taxi service to Auli (Rs 15, one hour). Further details are included in the Planning section for each trek.

MUNSYARI

☎ 05961 / alt 2290m

Munsyari is the gateway for treks to Milam as well as to the Nanda Devi East Base Camp. The town's dramatic setting on a hillside high above the roaring Gori Ganga is further enhanced by unrivalled views of the snow-capped Panch Chuli peaks. Its isolated location – being at least one long day's drive from Naini Tal or Almora – has contributed to its charm, as many trekkers have testified after exploring this remote corner of the Himalaya.

Information

There are several internet outlets in Munsyari from where you can also make STD and ISD calls. At present there are no ATMs in Munysari, and changing money is a problem. It is recommended you bring enough cash with you from Almora or Naini Tal to pay for the trek arrangements.

Supplies & Equipment

Fruit, vegetables, rice and cooking oil are available; however, bring luxury and tinned items with you. Cooking gear, including stoves, can be purchased in the market.

Trekking Agents

There are a number of small agents including **Nanda Devi Tour N Trek** (☎ 222324; trek_beeru@rediffmail.com) near the bus station and **Johar Tour & Treks** (☎ 222752) run by Kuldeep Singh Rawat who will come to your hotel to make the necessary arrangements.

Porters in the region are notoriously expensive and unreliable (see boxed text, p178). However, if you're trekking to Milam (without taking the options to the Nanda Devi East Base Camp or to the Ralam Valley) then you can get by with mules that work out at around Rs 300 per day.

Sleeping & Eating

Most of the hotels and lodges are within short walking distance from the bus station. These include **Hotel Pandey Lodge** (☎ 222286; dm/r from Rs 50/350) and **Johar Hill Resort** (☎ 222752; dm/r from Rs 50/800). There is also **Zara Resort** (☎ 222524; www.zararesorts.com; r from Rs 990) and **Wayfarer Mountain Resort** (☎ 222529; www.wayfareradventures.com; r from Rs 1200).

There are a number of *dhabas* in the main bazaar.

Getting There & Away

There is a daily bus to/from Bageshwar (Rs 300, 12 hours) from where there are regular buses to Almora (Rs 57, three hours) and Naini Tal (Rs 140, five hours) with onward connections to Delhi.

MUSSOORIE

☎ 0135 / alt 2000m / pop 29,300

The hill station of Mussoorie is an important gateway to the Garhwal. Its ridge-top location offers commanding views south across the Siwalik foothills and the Indian Plains, and north to the Himalaya Range. Since it was established in the 1820s, many trekkers have set out to explore the forests, ridges and variety of hill cultures. Today the town retains some of its former charm and a few relaxing days can be spent here before or after a trek.

Information

There are a number of bookshops in Mussoorie including the **Cambridge Bookshop** (The Mall), which has a wide stock of books on the Garhwal including those by local authors Ruskin Bond and Bill Aitkin. This is also the last stop for accessing the internet before heading to the hills. However, STD and ISD calls can be made here or at one of the towns closer to the trailhead. There are ATMs and money-changing facilities, including the **State Bank of India** (Kulri Bazaar). It is best to change money here.

Supplies & Equipment

A wide range of tinned food and luxury items are available in Mussoorie while fresh supplies of fruit and vegetables can be purchased from the trailhead.

If you need to hire camping equipment, contact the **GMVN Office** (☎ 013 5 47 6817) in Dehra Dun, although there is sometimes a shortage of quality gear. Cooking equipment can be purchased in the market.

Trekking Agents

Trekking agents include **Trek Himalaya** (☎ 2631302; www.trekhimalaya.com; Upper Mall); and **Himalayan Trekkers**

(☎ 983 725 8589) at the head of the bazaar in Sankri can organise porters for around Rs 250 to Rs 300 per day. Guides/cooks can also be arranged.

Sleeping & Eating

There is a range of accommodation in Mussoorie, although it is pricier than other hill stations. **Hotel Broadway** (☎ 2632243; Camels Back Rd, Kulri Bazaar; d from Rs 250) is a good option. Close by is **Hotel Deep** (☎ 2632470; r Rs 200-800). The **Kasmanda Palace Hotel** (☎ 2632424; off The Mall; r from Rs 2000) is highly recommended as is **Hotel Padmini Nivas** (☎ 2631093; off the Mall; r from Rs 2000).

In Gandhi Chowk, there is Whispering Windows and City Point Restaurant. Both offer a variety of European, Chinese and Indian dishes. Further east along the Mall is the Meeting Point Cafe while the Tavern is also popular.

Getting There & Away

There are regular buses between Mussoorie and Dehra Dun (Rs 35, two hours). To Delhi, there are overnight deluxe buses (Rs 900, eight hours) departing at around 8.30pm.

There are several bus services to Hanuman Chatti and Uttarkashi, as well as a daily bus service to Purola with connections to Naitwar and Sankri. Prices and details are included in the Planning section for each trek.

For trains, contact **Northern Railway Booking Agency** (☎ 2632846; The Mall, Kulri Bazaar) for reservations or check out a local travel agent who can make an online reservation. The most convenient connection to/from Delhi is to take the Shatabdi Express (chair seat Rs 470/900). It departs Dehra Dun at 5pm and arrives in New Delhi at 10.40pm. The Mussoorie Express (sleeper/1st class Rs 140/390, 11 hours) leaves Dehra Dun at 9.30pm and arrives the following morning in Delhi.

NAINI TAL

☎ 05942 / alt 1938m / pop 39,840

This attractive hill resort is one of the main gateways for trekking in the Kumaon region. The town is centred on the large lake or tal, hence the name Naini Tal. In 1839 the town was selected as a retreat for British people wanting a reminder of the Lake District in northern England. Yet Naini Tal could offer far more, for besides the lake and the forest walks the surrounding ridges provide fine views of the Himalaya.

Information

There are plenty of internet cafes, and ISD and STD calls can be here and also in some of the main towns closer to the trailhead. The **State Bank of India** (Malli Tal) and the **Bank of Baroda** (Talli Tal) have ATMs and can also exchange foreign currency. It is best to change money here as it is difficult elsewhere.

Supplies & Equipment

Fruit, vegetables and a wide range of food items are available. If trekking out of Loharket, bring all your supplies from Naini Tal or Bhageshwar.

The KMVN Trekking and Mountaineering Office has sleeping bags, tents and insulated mats for hire. For rates, see Hiring Gear in India (p226). A substantial deposit is necessary, together with passport and itinerary details. However, quality equipment is often in short supply so it is advisable to bring your own gear with you. Cooking gear, including stoves, can be hired from the office or purchased in the market.

Trekking Agents

The **KVMN Trekking and Mountaineering Office** (☎ 236043) is at Sukha Tal on the outskirts of Naini Tal. There are also trekking agents in Almora, who offer inclusive arrangements with guide, porters, food and accommodation for around Rs 1500 per person per day. However, unless the guides are outstanding and the agents have a means of making arrangements at short notice, it is debatable whether there is any advantage in making a booking.

At the trailhead at Loharket (for the Pindari Glacier trek, p175), there is no shortage of porters. The going rate is around Rs 300 per porter per day.

Sleeping & Eating

Naini Tal is not a cheap place to stay in high season (May, Jun, mid-Sept to mid-Oct). The following rates are an indication of high-season prices. Most budget hotels are to the south of the Mall, such as **Hotel Lake View** (☎ 235632; Ramsey Rd, Talli Tal; d Rs

500-1200). The **KMVN Hotel Snow View Heritage** (☎ 238570; Snow View; r from Rs 800) is the best of the government-run hotels, while the **Evelyn Hotel** (☎ 235457; The Mall, Talli Tal; r from Rs 1500) with rooms overlooking the lake is also worth considering.

There are many recommended cafes and restaurants on the Mall including the popular Cafe de Mall, the Mahan Restaurant as well as the Embassy, which is something of an institution in Naini Tal. There is also no shortage of simple eating places in the vicinity of the Tibetan market on the north side of the lake. Consider also having a drink at the **Naini Tal Boat Club** (The Mall, Malli Tal), which offers temporary membership for Rs 300. The club is a classic remnant of the British Raj complete with a dress code that suggests you might leave your trekking gear back at the hotel.

Getting There & Away

Many private companies offer deluxe buses to/from Delhi, most in the evening (Rs 1000, nine hours). Public buses leave Talli Tal bus stand early morning or late afternoon (Rs 380, 10 hours). Half-hourly buses run to/from the railway at Kathgodam (Rs 27, 1½ hours) and to/from the nearby regional bus station at Haldwani (Rs 32, two hours). Regular buses go to/from Almora (Rs 70, three hours) and Bageshwar (Rs 140, five hours), and from Bageshwar to Munsyari (Rs 300, 12 hours).

Kathgodam (35km south of Naini Tal) is the nearest railway station. The Train Booking Agency in Talli Tal can make reservations although it is preferable to book as far in advance as possible, particularly in peak season. Overnight trains to Delhi, including the Ranikhet Express (sleeper/2AC Rs 148/875), depart Kathgodam at 8.45pm and arrive in Old Delhi at 4.45am.

Further details are included in the Planning section for each trek.

RISHIKESH

☎ 0135 / alt 356m / pop 79,590

Rishikesh is a popular pilgrim and meditation centre and also the gateway for the Char Dham to the sacred sources of the Ganges. Each year many thousands of Hindu pilgrims congregate on the banks of the Ganges at Haridwar and camp at Rishikesh before undertaking their journey. It is not surprising that there are many trekking agencies here, some offering extended treks beyond Mussoorie, Uttarkashi and Joshimath.

Information

The GMVN Trekking & Mountaineering Centre at the **GMVN Tourist Office** (☎ 2430799; www.gmvnl.com; Lakshman Jhula Rd, closed Sun) is helpful as are the local trekking agents (see below). There are a number of internet outlets close to the GMVN Tourist Office, while STD and ISD calls can be made here or in one of the towns closer to the trailhead. For changing money there are ATMs at the **State Bank of India** (Swarg Ashram & Dehra Dun Rd) and **Bank of Baroda** (Dehra Dun Rd), while several travel agents will change money. Getting cash closer to the trailhead may be a problem.

Supplies & Equipment

A wide assortment of supplies can be purchased at Rishikesh, although for treks out of Mussoorie, Uttarkashi and Joshimath it is advisable to buy bulky items, including fresh vegetables and fruit, closer to the trailhead.

The GMVN Trekking & Mountaineering Centre has gear for hire. A substantial deposit is required, along with your passport details and proposed itinerary. The rates for two-person tents/sleeping bags are Rs 65/25 per day. Other items, including windproof jackets and gear to outfit your porters, are also available.

Trekking Agents

The GMVN Trekking & Mountaineering Centre offers a comprehensive selection of treks lead by experienced guides. Prices are in the vicinity of Rs 2000 per person per day.

There are about a dozen local agents in the immediate vicinity of the GMVN office. It is difficult to recommend a particular agency as the local guides may not be a permanent fixture. Contact a few agents before making a booking, such as **Garhwal Himalayan Exploration** (☎ 2433478; www.thegarhwalhimalayas.com); **Step Himalayan Adventures** (☎ 2432581; stephim@vsnl.com); **Red Chilli Adventure** (☎ 2434021; www.redchilliadventure.com).

Sleeping & Eating

Close to the trekking agents, the **GMVN Tourist Bungalow** (☎ 2431793; East Bank of the Ganges; d from Rs 1250) offers rooms. If spending extra time in Rishikesh, consider staying in one of the small hotels in High Bank up the hill from Lakshman Jhula Bhandari including the **Swiss Cottage** (☎ 2432939; d Rs 200) and **High Bank Peasants Cottage** (☎ 2431167; r from Rs 500).

There is a restaurant at the older GMVN Tourist Bungalow on Hardiwar Bypass Rd, while Devraj Coffee House in Lakshman Jhula comes highly recommended.

Getting There & Away

Regular buses go to/from Haridwar (Rs 40, one hour), from where there are buses every 30 minutes to/from Delhi (Rs 120, six hours). There is also a service every half-hour to/from Dehra Dun (Rs 35, two hours). Several buses a day run to/from Uttarkashi (Rs 110, seven hours), Joshimath (Rs 150, eight hours) and Hanuman Chatti (Rs 170, eight hours). There is one daily direct service to Ghuttu (Rs 160, seven hours), while many buses go to Tehri (Rs 65, seven hours), from where there are connections to Ghuttu (Rs 65, three hours).

A taxi/shared seat to Ghuttu is Rs 2300/230; to Uttarkashi, Rs 1400/140; and to Joshimath, Rs 2500/250.

Further details are included in the Planning section for each trek.

UTTARKASHI

☎ 01374 / alt 1158m / pop 16, 220

Uttarkashi is an important pilgrim centre in the picturesque Bhagirathi Valley. It is visited by thousands of pilgrims as they make their way from Hanuman Chatti (and Yamunotri) on the second day of the Char Dham to Gangotri. It is also an important access town for trekking in the Garhwal, including treks out of Gangotri and the nearby trails to Dodi Tal and Hanuman Chatti.

Information

The **Nehru Institute of Mountaineering** (☎ 222123; www.nimindia.org) 3km outside Uttarkashi has a museum and staff that offer reliable trekking information. Check the website for details and admission information. There are a number of internet outlets close to the GMVN Tourist Office in Bhatwari Rd, while STD and ISD calls can be made here or in one of the towns en route to Gangotri. There are no ATMs. If making independent arrangements, change money at Rishikesh.

Supplies & Equipment

The market sells vegetables and fruit, tinned milk, oatmeal, soup packets, and nuts and raisins. If trekking out to Dodi Tal, buy all supplies here. If trekking out of Gangotri, vegetables, fruit, rice and flour are available there.

Although Uttarkashi has a number of trekking agents, there is a limited amount of quality gear for hire. **Mount Support** (☎ 222419) is the best bet, with a stock of sleeping bags, tents and insulated mats, plus cooking tents, stoves and associated cooking items. Other cooking gear is also available in the market.

Trekking Agents

Many of the guides trained at the Nehru Mountaineering Institute. Among the more established are the following agencies: **Crystal Adventure** (☎ 222506; crystalnature@radiffmail.com; Bhatwari Rd); **Mount Support** (☎ 222419; mountsupport@radiffmail.com; Bhatwari Rd) and **Highland Trek & Tour** (☎ 222680; highlandtreks@radiffmail.com; Bhandari Hotel).

Sleeping & Eating

Places to stay include the **GMVN Tourist Bungalow** (☎ 22271; off Bhatwari Rd; dm/d Rs 100/700), including **Hotel Shivlinga** (☎ 223518; Bhatwari Rd; d from Rs 700) and **Hotel Vijayraj** (☎ 222334; Bhatwari Rd; r Rs 400).

Given the number of Indian pilgrims travelling to Gangotri it is not surprising that most hotels serve good vegetarian Indian food. On Bhatwari Rd, Preeti Restaurant and Bhandari Restaurant serve Indian and Chinese cuisine.

Getting There & Away

Uttarkashi is an important stop en route to Gangotri. Buses operate to/from Gangotri (Rs 80, four to five hours) and Rishikesh (Rs 110, seven hours). Shared taxis are not much more expensive than the bus and can be hired close to the bus station.

East Himalaya – Darjeeling & Sikkim

HIGHLIGHTS

- View the huge flanks of **Khangchendzonga** (p191) – the third-highest mountain in the world
- Appreciate the multitude of blooms in some of the Himalaya's finest **rhododendron forests** (p194)
- Camp alongside yak-herders' encampments on the ever-popular **Dzongri & Goecha La** trek (p194)
- Wander through the multitude of Nepalese villages along the **Singalila Ridge** (p191)
- Appreciate the Tibetan community at the isolated village of **Tsokha** (p196) deep in the forests of Sikkim

Khangchendzonga – the third highest mountain in the world, provides an inspiring backdrop when trekking in Darjeeling and Sikkim. Until the discovery of the height of Mt Everest in the 19th century, Khangchendzonga was considered to be the highest mountain in the world. Viewing its huge flanks rising high above the foothills, it is not hard to understand why, while the many 7000m peaks complete an impressive panorama.

Yet there are more than mountain views to whet the appetite of the seasoned trekker. The trails lead from steamy, subtropical forest with bamboo, luxuriant ferns and orchids to temperate forest bands with ancient oak and rhododendron trees before heading to the alpine meadows that afford uninterrupted views of the high mountains.

There are also the cultural attractions. If trekking through the dominantly Nepalese villages situated on the Singalila Ridge out of Darjeeling, it would not be hard to imagine that you were undertaking a trek in Nepal. In Sikkim, anticipate visiting Lepcha settlements and Tibetan villages (established by Tibetans exiled from their homeland in 1959) as well as opportunities to share campsites with yak herders who graze their animals on the alpine slopes throughout the summer.

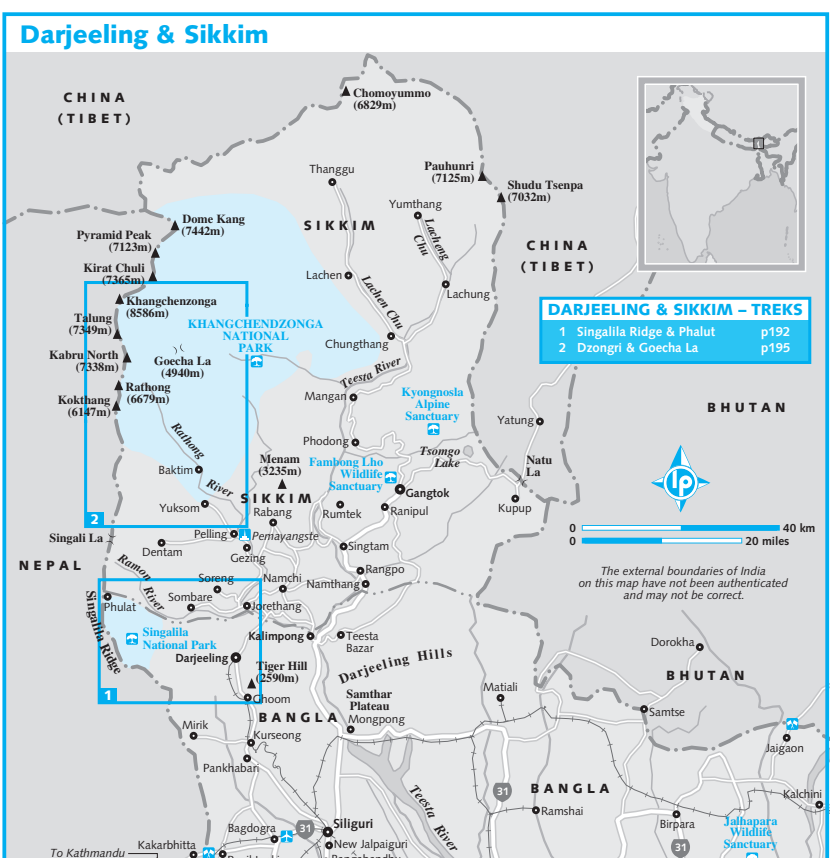
HISTORY

Darjeeling

Darjeeling was part of Sikkim until the beginning of the 19th century. In 1780 the Gurkhas invaded Sikkim as part of their plan to establish a vast trans-Himalayan empire. The British East India Company was drawn into the conflict, leading to the Gurkha Wars. This resulted in the Treaty of Siliguri in 1817. Territory lost to the Gurkhas was restored to the rajahs of Sikkim, on the condition that the British took control of their external affairs. It was during a local border dispute in 1828 that two British officers visited Darjeeling and recognised its potential as a hill station. This information was not lost on the authorities in Calcutta; in 1835, they pressured the rajah to grant them Darjeeling in exchange for an annual payment.

However, the rajah was not totally comfortable with the agreement. In 1849 matters came to a head when the British Superintendent of Darjeeling, and the renowned botanist Dr Joseph Hooker, were arrested by authorities while touring Sikkim. The British took this as an affront and, after the release of the prisoners, temporarily withdrew the rajah's stipend and annexed the area between the Sikkim border and the Indian Plains. This effectively redrew the borders of Sikkim, cutting it off from the plains except through British territory, while giving Darjeeling direct access to the rest of British India.

The development of Darjeeling was rapid. The newly completed road from the



plains was upgraded and the small settlement expanded. The administrators from the East India Company were inspired by the magnificent views of Khangchendzonga. The tea plantations also thrived and a large number of workers were hired from across the border in Nepal. The Tea Planters' Club was established in 1868, and the narrow-gauge railway was completed in 1882.

Darjeeling remained part of Bengal after 1947. However, in 1985, the Gurkhas and Nepalese mounted their own political group with the aim of making Darjeeling an independent hill state. A compromise was reached in 1988, which gave the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) a large measure of autonomy while in 2008 the DGHC gained further financial autonomy from the West Bengal government.

Sikkim

The Lepchas, a tribal people thought to have migrated from Assam in the 13th century, originally populated Sikkim. They were essentially nature worshippers, moving from one forest clearing to the next. With the migration of the Tibetans to Sikkim in the 17th century, the Lepchas were forced to move to more remote regions.

In 1641 the fifth Dalai Lama in Lhasa appointed Phuntsog Namgyal the first ruler of Sikkim. At this time, Sikkim included part of eastern Nepal; part of the Chumbi Valley in Tibet; some of the western valleys of Bhutan; and, to the south, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and the territory down to the Indian Plains.

Boundaries were altered as a result of the wars with Bhutan between 1717 and 1734. Sikkim lost much of the southern foothills and Kalimpong on the India-Tibet trade route. More territory was lost after 1780, following the Gurkha expansion in Nepal. However, as a result of the Gurkha Wars, the Treaty of Siliguri (1817) returned the territory to the rajah of Sikkim. In exchange, the British were granted control over Sikkim's external affairs, including trade with Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan.

In 1861 Sikkim was declared a British protectorate. However, the Tibetans were becoming increasingly suspicious of the British expansion and in 1886 they invaded Sikkim. The British resisted, and in 1890 a separate treaty declared Sikkim a semi-independent state, administered by the rajah under the guidance of a British Political Officer. It was not until 1902 that a Boundary Commission was established to determine the current borders between Sikkim and Tibet.

The British were keen to develop the country and encouraged workers from Nepal to settle in Sikkim. This continued after 1947, when India became independent and Sikkim became a protectorate within the Indian Union. Indeed, in the early 1960s, the Nepalese constituted 75% of Sikkim's population. During this time, Sikkim's rajah upheld a policy to prohibit further immigration and to restrict the rights of Nepalese to gain citizenship. Demonstrations followed and the rajah sought refuge in India. India intervened, the rajah abdicated in 1975 and Sikkim became the 22nd state of the Indian Union.

ENVIRONMENT

West of the hill station of Darjeeling (2134m) is Singalila Ridge that forms the border between Darjeeling and Nepal. This is the most popular area for trekking in the region. To the north, Darjeeling's border with Sikkim is defined by the course of the Raman River.

The Singalila Ridge extends north forming the geographic divide and political border between Nepal and Sikkim. It includes Khangchendzonga (8586m) as well as Nepal Peak (6910m), Kirat Chuli (7365m), Pyramid Peak (7123m), Dome Kang (7442m), Jongsang (7483m), Lhonak Peak (6710m) and Talung (7349m) and extends to Sikkim's borders with Tibet. South of Khangchendzonga are the towering peaks of Kabru (7338m), Rathong (6679m), Kokthang (6147m), Kabru Dome (6600m) and Forked Peak (6108m) that form an impressive backdrop when undertaking a trek out of Yuksom on the southern borders of the Khangchendzonga National Park. (See the Flora & Fauna boxed texts on p190 and p197.)

CLIMATE

Darjeeling and Sikkim are subject to similar weather patterns. In April and May the day temperatures rise to around 20°C. In late May, huge clouds build up, signalling the onset of the monsoon. By early June, the

East Himalaya experiences the first continuous monsoon rain. July and August, with more than 700mm, see the highest rainfall, establishing a pattern that continues until the end of September. In the post-monsoon season (October and November), day temperatures sit around 10°C and the settled conditions are ideal for trekking. Winter temperatures fall to near freezing, with snowfall common on the ridges from December to March, or April at higher elevations.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The pre-monsoon season extends from April until the end of May and although there is a build-up of cloud in May the early mornings are generally clear. The first of the heavy monsoon rains fall by early June and continue until the end of September. By early October the monsoon clouds clear, however it is advisable to wait until the middle of October to ensure the best views. A settled weather pattern with clear, sunny days continues until the end of November. This is an ideal time to trek in both Darjeeling and Sikkim to view the high peaks. The first of the winter snows settle above 3500m by early December. While the snowfalls preclude trekking above the forest line in Sikkim this should not deter well-equipped trekkers' from heading up the Singalila Ridge out of Darjeeling until the end of December.

Maps

Accurate topographical maps of the Darjeeling and Sikkim region are at a premium. In Darjeeling, the map sections available from the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHT) Tourist Reception Centre, and Clubside Tours & Travels provide a start. In Sikkim the NEPA Map series 1:150,000 is about the best available, although the U502 series *Khangchendzonga*, section 1:250,000 45:3 is worth getting hold of for more detailed information.

Books

Useful guidebooks for off-the-trail activities include *Sikkim, Darjeeling & Kalimpong* by Wendy Brewer Lama, *An Introduction to the Hill Stations of India* by Graeme Westlake and *Sikkim – A Travellers Guide* by Sujoy Das and Arundhati Roy. For details of climbing expeditions in the region refer to *Abode of Snow* by Kenneth Mason, *Exploring the Hidden Himalaya* by Soli Mehta and Harish Kapadia, and *Himalayan Odyssey* by Trevor Braham.

Permits & Regulations

A permit is necessary to trek in the Singalila National Park out of Darjeeling. A permit is also necessary to visit Sikkim. It

FLORA & FAUNA – DARJEELING

You don't have to trek to see the wildlife that is very close to the town of Darjeeling! In the forest, below the town and close to the Tibetan refugee camp, there have been sightings of **serow**, **wild boars**, **black bears**, **forest leopards** and **barking deer**. However, a trek to Phalut in the Singalila National Park will provide additional rewards, including an outside chance of sighting the **red panda**.

Birdlife includes pheasants such as **monals** and **tragopans** on the upper forest level, while birds of prey include **lammergeiers** and **golden eagles**. **Snow** and **rock pigeons** may also be seen at the higher elevations, together with the **Himalayan snowcock**. A variety of **redstarts**, **forktails**, **finches** and **owls** are found in the mixed conifer and oak forests.

While there is evidence of denuded forest along the Singalila Ridge, there are extensive forests on the eastern slopes away from the villages. These include the temperate broad-leafed forest that extends to around 2700m before giving way to mixed conifer, including fine stands of **silver fir**. **Rhododendron** is common at higher altitudes (to around 3800m), while **roses**, **ferns** and **orchids** provide a further attraction.

Wildflowers in the alpine meadows and yak-grazing pastures include a range of **anemone**, **iris**, **primulae** and **saxifrage**. These thrive on the margins of the snowmelt and bloom throughout the monsoon.

also allows you to visit most of the southern towns, including Gangtok, Rumtek, Phodong and Pemayangtse. You will need photocopies of your passport details and one passport-sized photo. There is no fee. Permits are normally valid for 15 days from the specified date of entry and can be extended for up to 45 days. Note that re-entry into Sikkim within three months is not possible, even if you leave before your 15-day visa expires. See Darjeeling (p198) and Gangtok (p199) for further details.

A permit is necessary to trek in the Singalila national Park out of Darjeeling. The permit can be issued on the spot either at the national park office above Rimbik or if coming from Mana Bhanjang from the office just above Tonglu.

ACCESS TOWNS

Darjeeling (p198) and Gangtok (p199) are the gateway towns for this region.

Spending a day or two exploring Darjeeling and savouring views of Khangchendzonga will whet the appetite before heading for the hills. In Sikkim it is possible to travel directly from Darjeeling to Yuksom to commence the Dzongri & Goecha La trek. However, visit Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, to visit an agent and to finalise preparations before heading off on the trail. In Sikkim it is possible to travel directly from Darjeeling to Yuksom, however most travellers include a trip to Gangtok before commencing the trek.

SINGALILA RIDGE & PHALUT

Duration 6 days
Distance 76km
Difficulty easy
Start/Finish Rimbik
Nearest Town Darjeeling
Transport bus/shared taxi
Summary A spectacular trek through Nepalese villages and alpine meadows that affords magnificent views of Khangchendzonga.

The best trek in the Darjeeling region. The itinerary avoids most of the road developments along the Singalila Ridge, ascending trails through magnificent forest to Sandakphu for unsurpassed views of Khangchendzonga. After savouring further views from Phalut the trek heads back down through Nepalese villages to complete an innovative circuit to Rimbik. Allowing for an extra day for acclimatisation, this is a superb one-week trek.

PLANNING

When to Trek

The trekking season in Darjeeling is very similar to that in eastern Nepal. The post-monsoon season (October to November) brings clear days and warm temperatures, particularly in the valleys. Day temperatures drop to around 0°C in December and January, although trekking from lodge to lodge (following the alternative route) is still possible. Spring (March to May) has many attractions. The days are longer and the rhododendrons come into flower, remaining in full bloom until the first monsoon rains in early June.

What to Bring

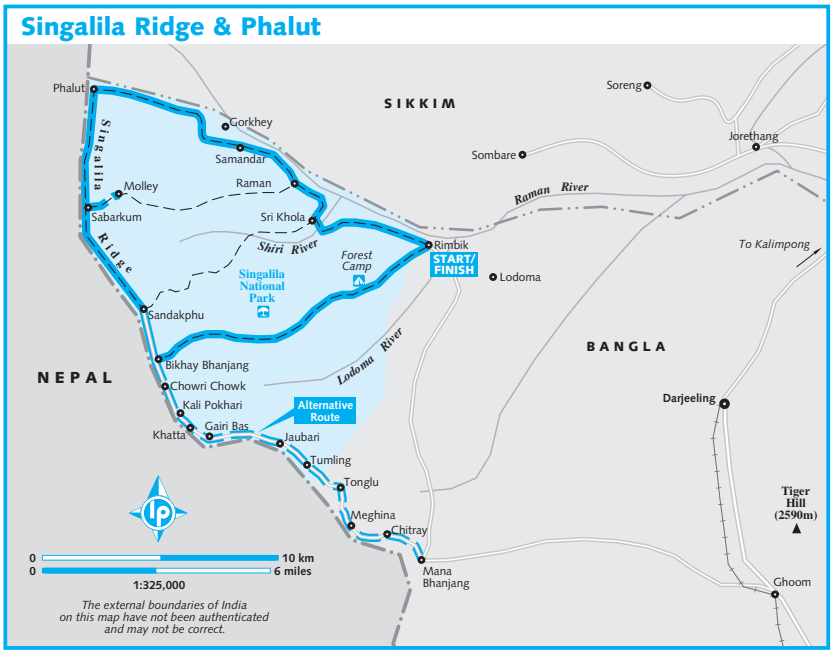
A good sleeping bag together with a tent is essential. The trek up the Singalila Ridge should not be considered as just a stroll out of Darjeeling. The weather on the higher ridges can deteriorate even during the warmer months, so appropriate clothing and footwear is necessary.

Accommodation

At Rimbik, there are privately run lodges including the **Sherpa Tensing Lodge** (r from Rs 100) and **Hotel Sherpa** (r from Rs 100); both have small restaurants. Once you reach Bikhay Bhanjang there are a number of private lodges with beds for around Rs 100. At Sandakphu, there are the **DGHC Trekkers' Huts** (dm/d/tr Rs 100/400/500) while the privately run Sherpa Chalet and Hotel Sunrise offer similar rates. There are also the trekkers' huts at Phalut and Raman. The trekkers' huts can be booked through **Glenary's** (☎ 2254026; Nehru Rd, Darjeeling). Note the huts become heavily booked in the April/May season.

Permits & Regulations

You will require a permit to enter the Singalila National Park (Rs 100, plus Rs 50 camera fee). Before setting off on the trek it is also necessary to hire a local guide in



Rimbik (Rs 350 per day) and at least one porter (Rs 250). This applies in particular if undertaking the trek from Mana Bhanjang. In Rimbik the rules aren't so rigidly enforced. Alternatively you can hire a guide from an established agency in Darjeeling. Allow around Rs 700 per day.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

From Darjeeling, take the bus to Rimbik (Rs 80, five hours). A shared taxi for around the same price is more convenient and faster. From Rimbik buses leave for Darjeeling around 7am while shared prebooked taxis leave around 6.30am. The last bus leaves at 1pm.

THE TREK

Day 1: Rimbik to Forest Camp

3–4 hours, 10km

An opportunity to acclimatise before heading to higher elevations. The trek above Rimbik winds through small farming villages set high above the Raman River. Beyond the villages is the Singalila National Park with its magnificent oak and conifer forests and delightful trails through forest clearings and tiny lakes marked by distinctive Buddhist prayer flags.

From **Rimbik** (2280m) the trail ascends from just above the main bazaar. There is no end of village trails that gradually ascend through Buddhist settlements with *mani* walls and even a Tibetan gompa. The villagers will put you right if you have any doubts regarding the route to the Forest Office and a reforestation area on the borders of the **Singalila National Park**. Allow one to 1½ hours. Once into the national park the trail is better defined up through a forest of bamboo and oak to a huge grassy clearing and a potential campsite (2520m), about two hours up from Rimbik. Continue up the forest trail to a smaller camp and a spring (2800m). The camp is located a short distance below a small sacred lake complete with prayer flags and stone engravings maintained by villagers from Rimbik.

Day 2: Forest Camp to Bikhay Bhanjang

4–5 hours, 14km

A steady ascent through mixed oak, conifer and rhododendron forest to a ridge that

affords glimpses of Khangchendzonga and the adjoining peaks as well as panoramic views across the rolling hills of southern Sikkim. There is also ample evidence of wildlife (wild boar and black bear) while bird-watchers will have a field day identifying the many redstarts, forktails and finches that thrive in the forest canopy.

From the forest camp the trail ascends steeply in places as it winds up to a distinctive ridge line that defines the watershed between this valley and the larger valley to the north formed by the Shiri River. From the ridge there are glimpses of the high mountains and the snow-capped peaks in the vicinity of Khangchendzonga. This section of the trek is devoid of water (so no chance of an intermediary camp) while the altitude nearing 3000m will also take its toll. The last few hours however involve a fairly long but gradual ascent before meeting the main trail and dirt road coming from Mana Bhanjang. From here follow the trail around and over to the village of **Bikhay Bhanjang** (3200m). Apart from the private lodges there are excellent campsites with fine views across the tea plantations and settlements of eastern Nepal.

Day 3: Bikhay Bhanjang to Sandakphu

2½–3 hours, 8km

A short stage to Sandakphu. The ascent provides fine views across the rolling hills of eastern Nepal as well as the deep valleys and forests of southern Sikkim. From Sandakphu there are unrivalled views of the Himalaya. To the north are magnificent views of Khangchendzonga, while Everest, Makalu and Lhotse are clearly visible on the eastern horizon. To the west the mountain panorama extends to Bhutan and the peaks that define its border with southern Tibet.

Beyond Bikhay Bhanjang it is immediately apparent that the forest has been severely denuded, reflecting the needs of many generations of Nepalese villagers. Add this to the scar on the mountainside caused by the dirt road and some of the developments at Sandakphu and you can appreciate some of the issues facing the authorities administering the Singalila National Park. It is, however, possible to avoid the road for much of the ascent to Sandakphu. The ascent is steep in sections with the stands of silver fir providing welcome shade before you reach **Sandakphu** (3620m).

The best viewing point is about 100m above the huts. To reach the vantage point head north along the trail before ascending for 10 minutes or so to the ridge summit that is covered in brightly coloured Buddhist prayer flags. Views are equally impressive at sunrise and sunset, although it is easier to identify Everest in the late afternoon after the sun has set behind the high peaks.

There is a choice of accommodation with rooms at the trekkers' huts or at one of the well-maintained private lodges in the nearby meadow.

Day 4: Sandakphu to Phalut

6–7 hours, 16km

Beyond Sandakphu the trail winds through the conifer forests and along the alpine ridges to Phalut. Savour views across the verdant hillside of southern Sikkim set beneath the awesome flanks of Khangchendzonga, while there are also options to ascend nearby ridges to view the tip of Everest.

From Sandakphu the ridge top at Phalut can easily be identified on the northern extremity of this section of the Singalila Ridge. The trail descends north through a forest of silver fir and rhododendron to a dip on the ridgeline (3450m). About 3km beyond Sandakphu the trail splits. Take the trail that heads north with uninterrupted mountain views as you complete the gradual climb to the deserted shepherds' hut at **Sabarkum** (3530m). To stay on the main route, follow the higher (signposted) trail to Phalut. The lower trail descends for 2km to the trekkers' huts at **Molley** (3420m). From Sabarkum, the trail straddles the ridge across the extensive alpine meadows for 7km, reaching the trekkers' huts at **Phalut** (3590m).

Day 5: Phalut to Raman

5–6 hours 13km

It's a 1000m descent from the high alpine ridges to the temperate climes of the upper Raman Valley. The trail descends through a range of forest bands from silver fir, rhododendron and bamboo to ancient oak and blue pine to a number of prosperous farming settlements.

The trail heads north along the ridge before descending through forest. The views

extend south to the ridge connecting Sabarkum and Raman and extensive silver-fir forest. The descent is steep in places and the forest can be slippery after heavy rainfall. It is also advisable not to follow the porter shortcuts unless you are very sure-footed. At lower elevations, there is evidence of black bears foraging in the lower conifer forest, while forest leopards are also common. Just above the village of Gorkhey, the trail splits. The lower trail descends to **Gorkhey** (2390m) along side the Raman River. However, it is possible to bypass Gorkhey and continue on the upper trail that goes directly to **Samandar** (2500m) where there is a secondary school and huge playing ground – with the chance to join in a game of soccer or cricket always in the offering. Continue for a further 2km to a side stream before the trail gradually ascends for 4km through oak and blue pine forest to **Raman** (2530m). The trekkers' huts are about a 10-minute hike above the main trail.

Day 6: Raman to Rimbik

5 hours, 15km

The final stage winds through villages and settlements that will, within a generation, be connected by road to Rimbik. For the time being the trek to the trailhead can be completed in a matter of hours, with time to reach Rimbik by late morning. It may also be possible to get onward transport back to Darjeeling the same day.

From Raman it is 6km (1½ hours) following a well-defined forest trail before a long and gradual descent to the fields of **Sri Khola** (2100m) with an assortment of tea stalls and lodges. The settlement of Sri Khola also marks the course of the Shiri River and the trail that descends directly from Sandakphu. After crossing the substantial bridge of the **Shiri River** the trail winds high above the Raman River before joining the road to complete the last few kilometres to **Rimbik** (2280m).

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: FROM MANA BHANJANG TO SANDAKPHU

2–3 days, 23km

Until the construction of the road along the Singalila Ridge in 2002, the trek from Mana Bhanjang to Bikhay Bhanjang and Sandakphu was the regular trekking route. Although it is possible to avoid the dirt road in places, the development has undoubtedly changed the character of the trek. On the first day the trek ascends from the market at **Mana Bhanjang** (2130m) to the gompa at **Chitray** (2480m). It continues through forest to the settlement of **Meghina** (2900m) and the substantial village of **Tonglu** (3100m) with fine views of Khangchendzonga and the adjoining peaks. Allow four to five hours on this day.

On the second day you enter the **Singalila National Park** and continue through a number of Nepalese villages including **Jaubari** (2900m), **Gairi Bas** (2525m), **Khatta** (2850m), **Chowri Chowk** (3100m) and **Kali Pokhari** (3100m) to reach the village of **Bhikay Bhanjang** (3200m). From here the route ascends to Sandakphu. Allow six to seven hours on this day although it is advisable to split this stage and spend a night at either Kali Pokhari or Bhikay Bhanjang to assist acclimatisation.

DZONGRI & GOECHA LA

Duration 7 days
Distance 103km
Standard moderate
Start/Finish Yuksom
Nearest Town Gangtok
Transport bus/shared taxi
Summary Trek through rhododendron forests and across yak pastures to the snow-capped peaks and glaciers below the awesome summit of Khangchendzonga.

This is the most popular trek in Sikkim, located in the southern reaches of the Khangchendzonga National Park. The trek ascends through a small Lepcha encampment at Baktim, to the Tibetan community at Tsokha and yak herders on the alpine plains above Dzongri.

In May, the rhododendrons are at their finest and a week or two could be spent appreciating the many varieties in the forest above Tsokha. The array of orchids and ferns in the subtropical forest and the wildflowers on the meadows between Dzongri and Samiti Lake provide a further attraction.

Be well prepared as inclement weather can occur with remarkable frequency when ascending towards the Goecha La.

PLANNING

When to Trek

There are two distinct trekking seasons: pre-monsoon season (early Apr to mid-May) and post-monsoon season (mid-Oct to mid-Nov). Pre-monsoon season is best for the rhododendrons, while post-monsoon season normally provides clearer views. Snowstorms can develop rapidly at higher altitudes in both seasons.

What to Bring

Your agent will supply a tent and insulated mat, plus most of the other trekking gear. However, check exactly what is supplied; if in doubt, at least bring your own sleeping bag.

Accommodation

Accommodation will be included as part of the trekking package provided by your agent in Gangtok. Determine whether your trek is tent-based or lodge-based. If it is lodge-based, be prepared for basic facilities in the trekkers' huts at Tsokha, Dzongri, Thangsing and Samiti Lake, and a Forest Rest House at Baktim offering little more than a wooden floor space to spread out your sleeping bag. They are also normally occupied by Indian students during the May/June school holidays. There is a choice of private lodges at Tsokha including the **Tsokha Lodge** (r Rs 140) and the **West Sikkim Lodge** (r Rs 140).

There are a number of comfortable lodges in Yuksom at the entrance to the Khangchendzonga National Park. These include **Hotel Wild Orchid** (r Rs 250) and the comfortable **Hotel Tashi Gang** (r Rs 1100-1300).

Permits & Regulations

You will require a trekking permit that will be sorted out by your trekking agent in Gangtok prior to setting out on the trek.

GETTING TO/FROM THE TREK

It is likely that your agent will organise your transport arrangements for you. If not, there is a shared-taxi service from Gangtok to Yuksom (Rs 200) that takes around six hours.

THE TREK

Day 1: Yuksom to Baktim

5–6 hours, 16km

This is a tough first day. It's a 1000m ascent to Baktim so an early start is necessary to reach camp in good shape. En route appreciate ancient oak, conifer and bamboo forest while luxuriant ferns and delicate orchids line the trail. On the final climb to Baktim savour remarkable views back down to Yuksom and its commanding position on a plateau high above the Rathong River.

Yuksom (1760m) marks the entrance to the **Khangchendzonga National Park**. Just after leaving the village you can see Baktim on a ridge high above the confluence of the Rathong and Prek Rivers, which will give you an idea of how to pace yourself for the day. The well-defined trail heads north through conifer and bamboo forest about 1000m above the Rathong River. There are however many tiring ups and downs to reach the side rivers, most of which are crossed by substantial bridges. Apart from one small clearing (after about 2½ to three hours), there are no settlements en route. Just above the confluence of the Rathong and Prek Rivers (the latter comes from the Goecha La) the trail descends (with mud

up to your knees, particularly after a heavy downpour) steeply to a substantial bridge over the **Prek River** (2250m). There follows a 500m ascent to the small settlement of **Baktim** (2750m), occupied by a family of Lepcha farmers. There is a Forest Rest House and a campsite, complete with a small spring, just below the settlement.

Day 2: Baktim to Phedong

4–5 hours, 11km

Although most itineraries seem intent on reaching Dzongri on the second day, an intermediary camp to acclimatise is necessary. It also allows more time to visit Tsokha, a village established in the early 1960s when this tract of land was granted to Tibetans who had recently escaped from Tibet. Beyond Tsokha the sheer variety of rhododendrons that burst into flower in late spring would keep the dedicated botanist busy for weeks.

The trail from Baktim heads up past rhododendron and magnolia trees to the substantial Tibetan village of **Tsokha** (3050m). The village consists of a dozen or so houses, a gompa, and rows of chortens lining the trail as well as several well-maintained lodges and tea stalls. From the village you also gain your first views of the high mountains, with the peak of **Pandim** (6691m) rising above the nearby forests. Just above the village, the trail splits. A small trail diverts towards the Rathong Valley, while the main trail continues up the ridge. Steep in sections, it passes through magnificent rhododendron forests. The forest trail is well defined, with wooden boards over sections that could be very muddy after heavy rainfall. **Phedong** (3650m) is a small clearing for camping. The water supply is about 200m down the side trail leading to the Prek Valley.

Day 3: Phedong to Dzongri

2–3 hours, 7km

Another early start is necessary to gain clear views of **Khangchendzonga** (8586m) as well as the impressive peaks of **Kokthang** (6147m) and **Rathong** (6679m) above the Rathong Valley together with **Kabru Dome** (6600m) and **Forked Peak** (6108m) that rise above the extensive alpine meadows of Dzongri.

From Phedong a steep ascent leads to the upper limit of the conifers and the top of the ridge separating the Prek and Rathong Valleys. From here gain you first uninterrupted views of Khangchendzonga and a complete panorama of snow-capped peaks. The route along the ridge is covered with dwarf rhododendron bushes and leads to the open, grazing meadows at **Dzongri** (4020m). The trekkers' huts are just below the main grazing area, while the best campsites are 1km further in an open meadow. Dzongri is a vast, windswept area where yaks from Yuksom and the surrounding villages graze from late March until early October.

From Dzongri, the views include nearby **Dzongri Peak**. About 300m above the camp, it is the best vantage point to view Khangchendzonga and the adjoining peaks. Climb the peak early in the morning for the best views.

SIDE TRIP: DZONGRI LA & RATHONG VALLEY

3–4/6–7 hours, 10km/13km return

The trail heads to the **Dzongri La** (4550m), a small pass to the west of **Kabur** (4810m). The 1½- to two-hour trek, with a steady ascent just before the pass, is rewarded by fine views across to the **Rathong Glacier** and the peaks that enclose Rathong Valley, including **Rathong**, **Kabru South**, **Kabru North**, **Kabru Dome** and **Forked Peak**.

Return directly to camp or continue for one to 1½ hours to the Rathong Valley for finer views of the spectacular peaks at the head of the valley. The trail then heads down the valley before commencing a steep ascent back to **Dzongri**. Take a local guide, as the trail is difficult to follow in places.

Day 4: Dzongri to Samiti Lake

6 hours, 14km

Beyond Dzongri, the peak of Pandim looms high above the Prek Valley. Below the impressive peaks are countless hanging glaciers and snowfields that define the upper reaches of this impressive alpine valley and the route to the Goecha La, providing a taste of the days to follow. The hanging glaciers and moraine fields leave little doubt that you are in the midst of the high mountains while the alpine meadows are particularly attractive in the pre-monsoon season.

From camp, head east from Dzongri to a series of cairns above the Prek Valley. From

FLORA & FAUNA – SIKKIM

The Khangchendzonga National Park constitutes around 25% of Sikkim's land. Within its boundaries, it supports a range of wildlife, including the Himalayan **red panda** (Sikkim's state animal), **forest leopards**, **black bears**, **musk deer** and **barking deer**. **Goral** and **serow** may also be sighted in the forest clearings. The elusive **clouded leopard** is confined to the most remote forest regions.

On higher elevations, there are **Himalayan Tahr**, **Nayan** or **Great Himalayan sheep**, plus *bharal* and **snow leopards**. While the chance of sighting even wild sheep and goats is small, they have been known to descend rapidly to lower altitudes after unseasonal snowfall.

Birdlife includes the **blood pheasant** (the state bird), and the **monal** and **tragopan** at higher forest elevations. Birds of prey include **lammergeiers**, **eagles**, **falcons** and **hawks**. **Tibetan snowcocks** and **snow partridges** are found in alpine meadows.

There is also a possibility of viewing migratory wildfowl, including the **bar-headed goose**, **eastern goosander**, **brown-headed gull**, and even the **black-necked crane** that settles in the high lakes of northern Sikkim.

The forests of Sikkim are generally more luxuriant than in Darjeeling. The temperate broadleafed forest with its many varieties of **oak**, **maple** and **magnolia** gives way to mixed conifer with **fir** and **spruce**. More than 50 flowering **rhododendron** species bloom from April to mid-May, providing a highlight of any trek in southern Sikkim. A number of **dwarf rhododendrons** and **juniper**, along with many flowering species of **iris**, **anemone** and **delphinium** are found in alpine meadows.

the ridge, a steep descent though rhododendron forest leads to the riverbed before heading up along the boulder-strewn riverbed to a bridge over the Prek River. The trail leads to the meadows at **Thangsing** (3930m).

From Thangsing, it is a two-hour climb up the valley to Samiti Lake. The gradual ascent heads across grazing meadows that are particularly attractive in the pre-monsoon season when the wildflowers burst into a riot of colour along the watercourses. The huts at **Zemathang** and the terminal moraine of the **Onglakhing Glacier** are the base for climbing attempts on Pandim. It also marks the beginning of the climb up the moraine to **Samiti Lake** (4200m) – the sacred source of the Prek River.

Day 5: Samiti Lake to Goecha La & Return to Thangsing

7–8 hours, 18km

The trek to the rarefied climes of the Goecha La is rewarded with unrivalled views of the massive East Ridge of **Khangchendzonga** high above the **Talung Glacier** as well as views of the high ridges and peaks that enclose the upper Prek Valley. Looking north there is a vast mountain region yet to explore, but for now the Goecha La is as far as you are permitted to go.

From Samiti Lake, it will take three to four hours to reach the **Goecha La** (4940m). The pass is often shrouded in mist and cloud not long after sunrise, so an early start is necessary. The trail heads along the far side of the lake and through moraine before crossing a sandy section alongside the **Onglakhing Glacier**. From here, you can see the pass at the head of the valley. However, the trek through the lateral moraine is tiring – more so if there has been a recent snowfall.

The Goecha La is marked with fluttering, colourful prayer flags, framing the peak of Khangchendzonga. The return trek via Samiti Lake to Thangsing will take three to four hours.

Day 6: Thangsing to Tsokha

6–7 hours, 17km

The magnificent rhododendron forest between the Prek Valley and the ridge at Pethang supports one of the finest arrays of rhododendrons in the East Himalaya. If time is not at a premium, elect to shorten the stage and camp at Pedong, and spend more time trying to identify some of the many flowering species.

From Thangsing, follow the trail back down to the Prek River to recross the bridge. Descend through the boulder field to the base of the climb back up to **Dzongri**.

Here, the trail divides. The upper trail leads to Dzongri, and the lower trail (main route) heads directly to **Phedong**. The lower trail is too narrow for laden yaks, so if they are accompanying your group they will have to return via Dzongri and descend the ridge to Phedong.

From **Phedong** the descent to **Tsokha** through the rhododendron and magnolia forest will take around two to three hours with plenty of time for a bowl of *thukpa* washed down with an ample supply of tongba (local barely beer).

Day 7: Tsokha to Yuksom

5–6 hours, 20km

It's a long way down from the heights of the Goecha La to the subtropical climes of **Yuksom**. Nearly 3200m to be precise, so don't be surprised if you have a bout of reverse altitude sickness as you adjust to the sometimes hot and sultry air as you complete the last few kilometres to Yuksom. The stage can be completed in a long morning with time to arrange onward transportation.

TOWNS & FACILITIES

DARJEELING

☎ 0354 / alt 2134m / pop 109,160

Surrounded by tea plantations and straddling a ridge with uninterrupted views of Khangchendzonga, Darjeeling is one of India's most famous hill stations. Its popularity can be traced from the mid-19th century. The climate and soil were also found to be ideal for tea cultivation, leading to the production of a world-famous variety of tea. Darjeeling is also a convenient base for visiting Kalimpong and Sikkim before heading off on a trek.

Information

The **DGHC Tourist Reception Centre** (☎ 2255351; Jawahar La Rd West) produces a trekking leaflet that is well worth getting hold of. The Oxford Bookshop in Chowrasta stocks local titles and a range of books for the trekker. There are many internet outlets as well as places to make STD and ISD calls. ATMs are located at the State Bank of India and at most of the other main banks. Foreign currency can also be exchanged at many hotels as well as at the authorised currency-exchange centres. It is essential to change money here as there are no facilities in Rimbik or on the trek.

Permits

A Sikkim permit can be issued in Darjeeling at the **District Magistrates Office** (☎ 225 4233; Hill Cart Rd, Darjeeling).

Supplies & Equipment

There is a wide variety of fruit and vegetables in the markets, plus food items such as tinned meat, fish, cheese, drinking chocolate, nuts and raisins. Chocolate bars and similar luxuries can also be purchased in Rimbik and on the trek. Pots and pans and cooking gear are also available in the market.

The Himalayan Mountaineering Institute does not hire out climbing and trekking gear. Buy passable gear at the **Trekking Shop** (Singalila Market, Nehru Rd) or hire gear through one of the local trekking agencies. However, it is best to bring your own rucksack, sleeping bag and insulated mat.

Trekking Agents

There are literally hundreds of travel and trekking agents in Darjeeling, which can organise treks out of Darjeeling and in Sikkim. These are just two: **Himalayan Travels** (☎ 2256956; kkgurung@cal.vsnl.net.in; 18 Gandhi Rd) and **Samsara Tours, Travels & Treks** (☎ 2252874; samsara1@sancharnet.in; Laden La Rd).

Sleeping & Eating

The best of the budget accommodation includes **Hotel Aliment** (☎ 2255068; Dr Zakir Hussain Rd; r from Rs 300) and the **Maple Tourist Lodge** (☎ 2252813; Old Kuchery Rd; r from Rs 350). **Pineridge Hotel** (☎ 2254074; Nehru Rd; r from Rs 750) could see better days, while **Hotel Seven Seventeen** (☎ 2252017; 26 HD Lama Rd; d from Rs 1000) is also recommended.

There is no shortage of impressive top-end hotels, including the **New Elgin** (☎ 2257226; HD Lama Rd; s/d Rs 4100/4400) and the **Windamere Hotel** (☎ 2254041; Jawahar Rd West; s/d Rs 5200/6000). Above the town, **Cedar Inn**

(☎ 2254446; Jalaphar Rd; s/d Rs 4000/4500) has great views of Khangchendzonga.

Glenary's (Nehru Rd) is justifiably popular for its coffee and cakes. It has a separate restaurant serving Indian and Chinese cuisine. Many of the hotels have good restaurants. On HD Lama Rd, a number of Tibetan restaurants serve simple cuisine, while there are plenty of Indian eateries in the vicinity of Hotel Seven Seventeen.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The nearest airport is at Bagdogra. **Indian Airlines** (☎ 2254230; Chowrasta) and **Jet Airways** operate daily flights to Delhi for Rs 19,770. Jet Airways has agents are at **Clubside Tours & Travels** (☎ 2254646; JP Sharma Rd) and **Pineridge Travels** (☎ 2253912; Nehru Rd).

BUS

From the Chowk Bazaar bus/jeep station several buses go to New Jaipaiguri and Siliguri (Rs 60, four hours). Shared taxis are a convenient alternative (Rs 80, three hours).

TRAIN TO DELHI

New Jalpaiguri is the main station for trains to/from Delhi. The most convenient way to reach New Jalpaiguri is by shared 4WD or taxi leaving from **Chowk Bazaar** (Rs 100, 2½ hours). There is a Toy Train service, but it takes at least eight hours and is for enthusiasts only. For train services to/from Delhi see p45.

TO/FROM KATHMANDU

By far the easiest (and most expensive) way to get to Kathmandu is to hire a taxi (Rs 2200) that has a special permit to cross the border into Nepal to the airport at Bhadrapur. A travel agent in Darjeeling can book this for you, together with the onward air ticket to Kathmandu (US$190). As most of the Nepalese air carriers fly from Kathmandu to Bhadrapur around midday and return early afternoon, you can leave Darjeeling mid-morning and be in Kathmandu that afternoon. If travelling in the opposite direction, you can leave Kathmandu around midday and be in Darjeeling later that afternoon.

If travelling by road all the way to Kathmandu it is best to take the shared 4WD to Siliguri from where you get another shared 4WD to the border at Kakarbhitta. Onwards from Kakarbhitta there are many buses (Nepalese Rs 600, Indian Rs 375). There is no Nepalese consulate in Darjeeling, but a 15-day visa can be issued at the border (US$25) and can be extended in Kathmandu. Foreign exchange is also available at the Nepal Bank counter.

GANGTOK

☎ 03592 / alt 1676m / pop 31,100

Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, is on a ridge above the Ranipul River. Spectacular views extend to Khangchendzonga and the peaks on the Singalila Ridge between Nepal and Sikkim. Spend time wandering forest trails beyond the town or visiting the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, established in 1958 to promote the language and cultural traditions of Tibet. Rumtek gompa (Tibetan Buddhist monastery), and the traditional seat of the head of the Kargyupa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, is a further attraction. It is 24km away by road on the far side of the valley.

Information

The **Government of Sikkim Tourist Office** (☎ 22064; MG Marg) has a limited stock of maps and literature on trekking. There are many internet outlets from where you can also make STD and ISD calls. ATMs are located at the **State Bank of India** (MG Marg) as well as at most of the other major banks where you can also change money. Although you will have paid your Gangtok agent for the trekking arrangements, take money from Gangtok for miscellaneous expenses as it is difficult to exchange money after you leave Gangtok.

Permits

To travel to Gangtok it is necessary to have a permit, which can be issued in Darjeeling. Trekking permits are organised by your trekking agent in Gangtok. Generally they are for a maximum of 15 days and are for a minimum of two people trekking together. The agent will require your passport and visa details at least a month before your arrival.

Supplies & Equipment

Fresh vegetables and fruit and a wide range of tinned items are available in Gangtok.

However, most arrangements (including food) are made by a local agent. All you need to buy are some extra snacks for the trek.

It is difficult to hire sleeping bags, tents or down jackets. Check carefully with your trekking agent as to what exactly is provided and gear yourself up accordingly. Bring your own sleeping bag and waterproof jacket.

Trekking Agents

In general, trekking agents in Gangtok are knowledgeable about the mountain regions and aware of environmental considerations. Rates per day for trekking are in the vicinity of Rs 2000 upwards per person.

Recommended agents in Gangtok are **Altitude Tours & Travels** (☎ 983237050; www.trekkingsikkim.com; Tourism Blgd, MG Marg); **Modern Treks & Tours** (☎ 204670; info@modern-hospitality.com Modern Central Lodge, MG Marg); **Vajra Adventure Tours** (☎ 222446; Kyitsel House, Arithang Rd) and **Yak & Yeti Travels** (☎ 224643; yakyeti@mailcity.com; Harka Kala Bhavan, 31A National Hwy).

Sleeping & Eating

Most trekking agents will book accommodation for you as part of their travel package, with competitive rates for most hotels. The **Modern Central Lodge** (☎ 204670; 31AN Hwy; r from Rs 300) and **Travel Lodge** (☎ 203858; Tibet Rd; r from Rs 300) are both recommended. Midrange accommodation includes the **Kanchen Residency** (☎ 973 207 2614; Tibet Rd; r from Rs 450); **Hotel Sonam Delek** (☎ 222566; Tibet Rd; d from Rs 800) and the very comfortable **Hotel Tashi Delek** (☎ 222991; MG Marg; r Rs 1300-1800).

Tangerine (Ground flr, Chumbi Residency, Tibet Rd) has been recommended, while the Rasoi Restaurant (Blue Sheep), above the Tourist Office, serves good-value Indian and Chinese dishes. There are many good, inexpensive restaurants including the **Bakers Café** (MG Marg) for breakfast and coffee, and the **Tourist Amenity** (beside the Enchey Gompa), which is one of the many places offering Tibetan momos.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The nearest airport is at Bagdogra, near Siliguri. There are daily flights to Delhi (Rs 19,774) and to Kolkata (Rs 10,426) with Jet Airways, Kingfisher, Spicejet and Indian Airlines.

BUS

There are private buses and shared 4WDs operating from the main stand at 31AN Highway to New Jalpaiguri (Rs 80-135, four hours) and to Darjeeling (Rs 90-125, five hours). The Sikkim Nationalised Transport (SNT) operates hourly buses to Siliguri (Rs 100, five hours) and a regular service to Darjeeling (Rs 125, 6½ hours). There are also private 4WDs operating from the Namnang Jeep Stand for Rumtek, Pelling and Yuksom, although it is likely that your trekking agent will take care of the local travel arrangements.

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ACCOMMODATION

The hotels in India are as varied as the county in both style and price. In Delhi this can vary from a dormitory in a budget hotel where a bed will set you back US$5, to stay a five-star, top-of-the-range hotel where a room can set you back over US$500 a night. And that's before state government and luxury taxes that can add 30% to the bill. Once into the hills, hotel rates are considerably more affordable. A room in a budget hotel would be in the vicinity of US$10 with or without private facilities; a mid range hotel US$30 with private facilities to over US$250 or more if you plan on having a room in a converted Maharajah's palace.

There are also seasonal variations. The high season in the Indian Himalaya extends from April through to June, and from mid-September until the end of October, which coincides with the student holidays and with a growing Indian- middle-class quest to stay for a week or two in the hills. Accordingly, many of the mid-range and upmarket hotels increase their rates by up to 50%. In some towns it may be difficult, although never impossible, to find a bed for the night. Shoulder season is generally July and August and low season November to the end of March. During these times rates are negotiable – although this is often not the ideal time to undertake a trekking expedition.

If booking in advance, try, if possible, to check out the style and structure of the hotel. In Leh, most hotels are two-storied, whitewashed structures in harmony with the surroundings. In Himachal and Uttarakhand some of the newly constructed hotels are more in keeping with

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider low-down on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

PRACTICALITIES

- The electric current is 230V to 240V, keep a multi-adapter with two-pin sockets and stock up on batteries before heading off on the trek.
- India has been using the metric system since 1966 although it is still possible to see milestones on some one of the smaller roads.
- All important documents including passport, credit cards, travel insurance etc should be photocopied before leaving home. Leave one copy at home and keep another one separately from the original.
- Visit the local offices of the Department of Forests and Wildlife that often have useful in formation on the region's flora and fauna.

developments in Mumbai or Delhi than the Himalaya.

In more remote locations before and after the trek look out for Forest Rest Houses (FRH) and Public Work Department (PWD) huts. Some are simply appointed with a verandah and string bed, others include carpet in the bedrooms and hot water. They come complete with a caretaker who can cook excellent Indian dishes. Expect to pay between US$10 and US$25 per night.

For further details refer to the Where to Stay section in the trekking chapters.

On the Trek

A major decision before leaving home is deciding whether you want to camp on the trek or whether to go on a lodge-based trek. This will impact on what equipment you bring with you as well as the actual trek you can undertake. In Ladakh the Himalayan homestays are as close as you will get to lodge-style trekking in Nepal, but with Ladakhi cuisine at night. The state government tourist wings – the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Niwas (GMVN) and the Kumaon Mandal Vikas Niwas (KMVN) – in Uttarakhand have built lodges on some of the most popular treks. Room tariffs range from Rs 500/US$12.50 to Rs 1000/US$25 per night. Before booking bear in mind that these need to be booked well in advance particularly in the school holidays in May and June when large groups of Indian students hit the trails.

LODGE-BASED TREKKING IN INDIA

Compared to the popular treks in the Annapurna and Everest regions of Nepal, there are few comparable lodge-based trekking itineraries in the Indian Himalaya. On some trails there may be a Dak Bungalow or a Forest Rest House built to accommodate forest or other government officers. There might be a parachute tent in Ladakh, while elsewhere you may expect a simple lodge run by either the state government or a local family. Then again a very basic pilgrim shelter may be just about it. Whatever is available is basic at best. Expect simple, often dormitory-type rooms. Do not expect hot showers, thick mattresses, heating or similar creature comforts experienced in Nepal. If food is provided, expect *dhal bhat* (lentils and rice) and perhaps some vegetables, not a menu of pizza and apple pie. Indeed, it has been said that a trek in India is comparable to trekking in Nepal in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

On the majority of the treks in India, you will need to bring a tent, sleeping bag and insulated mat together with a supply of food and cooking gear. Add to this your personal gear and you will probably need to consider employing a porter or two. This will naturally impact on your budget and the choice of treks open to you.

The following is a brief summary of treks that may be undertaken in India without the use of a tent, and where you can expect food to be cooked for you at night:

- In Ladakh, parachute-tent accommodation (ex–Indian Air Force parachutes) is often as good as it gets during the peak season (July and August). The Himalayan Homestays cover most but not all the stages when undertaking the Markha Valley trek, while the parachute options are available on some but not all of the stages on the Phugtal Gompa & Shingo La trek and Singge La & Lamayuru trek.
- In Himachal Pradesh, a shortened version of the Chandrakani Pass & Malana trek can be completed without tents or elaborate organisation.
- In Uttarakhand, some of the more popular treks can be undertaken staying over night at one of the GMVN and the KMVN lodges. These include the Har ki Dun trek, the trek as far as Dodi Tal and the Source of the Ganges trek. In the Kumaon the Pindari Glacier trek can be undertaken without a tent and food supplies.
- In Darjeeling, the Singalila Ridge & Phalut trek requires a tent and supplies for at least two days. If you wish to trek from lodge to lodge, consider the alternative route from Mana Bhanjang to Sandakphu, although this now follows a dirt road for most of the way.
- In Sikkim, there are lodges on the Dzongri & Goecha La trek. However, this is not a do-it-yourself trek, as all trekking arrangements must be made through a recognised agent in Gangtok.

ATTITUDES TO WOMEN

While Mahatma Gandhi championed opposition to the inequalities perpetuated by the caste system, the role of women, particularly in village communities, is still subject to many medieval attitudes. In some Hindu villages in Himachal and Uttarakhand, the traditional attitudes are still prevalent. These attitudes are also found in the Islamic regions of Kashmir. By contrast, women in the Buddhist regions of Ladakh, Zanskar and Spiti enjoy a more equal status, and women trekkers are often attracted to these regions.

In simple terms, the traditional attitudes in some remote villages are that there could be something wrong with females trekking without male company. Here, your guide – who normally comes from a more educated area – can assist by explaining why you have decided to trek without male company. This can go a long way to assist women trekkers who want to spend time in the villages, visit the local school and be invited into the houses.

Trekking crews (there are rarely, if ever, women porters, horse handlers or guides) treat women with more respect, although they will always defer to any males for instructions on where to camp, etc. It is an attitude to be recognised but will change as more women trek in India – it can be overcome to some extent with good humour and patience. Women trek leaders are likely to be treated with appropriate respect.

Fortunately, gender prejudice in the mountains does not translate into acts of violence, and the mountain trails are still safe in this respect. Indeed, the attitude of males is unlikely to be anywhere near as harassing as in large cities such as Delhi or Mumbai.

It is, however, not advisable to trek on your own (a consideration for both males and females). Expressions of friendliness can sometimes be misinterpreted, and misunderstandings do sometimes occur. The mention of a fictitious husband or boyfriend can deter unwanted advances.

Commonsense will guide you in most situations. It is not advisable to wear tight jeans, high-cut shorts or tight T-shirts. Trekking pants should be worn when entering more remote villages. When entering a temple or mosque, it is advisable to cover both legs and arms and wear a headscarf. In short, the more you cover up, the greater the likelihood of being accepted.

When bathing, go well away from a village or encampment; washing in a river with a bathing costume is generally not acceptable. For calls of nature along the trail, an umbrella or sarong can be used as a screen.

BUSINESS HOURS

In India, Sunday is the weekly holiday. The working week is from Monday to Friday from 10am to 5pm and Saturday morning. These working hours apply to government offices, banks, tourist offices and post offices. Most public holidays and festivals are normally regarded as holidays.

CHILDREN

Remember not too long, not too strenuous, and not at altitude.

Trekking with children is an ideal family holiday. Over the seasons, the author has arranged many treks for families and received much positive feedback.

A trek can be an eye-opener for children, especially when they compare the living standards of village children with their own. After initial adjustment, children quickly break down cultural barriers, as children tend not to feel the same social inhibitions as adults. It is difficult to specify a minimum age; some argue that seven is the youngest age at which the child will gain a worthwhile experience; others feel that only much older children should go on treks.

If planning a trek, try to get other families to come with you. It is also necessary that the children understand where they are going, and why they are going, well before departure. Find ways of keeping your children fully occupied; for example, devise checklists for identifying wildflowers and birds.

On the trek, don't include too many long stages. Children will tire easily and do not have the mental fortitude of adults in times of inclement weather or undue delays. Here, an obliging porter or horse-attendant may have to carry the child for at least some of the day.

CLIMATE

There is a wide range of climatic variation throughout the Indian Himalaya. Generally the trekking season commences as soon as the winter snow begins to melt in early May and continues until late October when the first of the winter snows settle on the high passes. However, the monsoon rains in July and August interrupt the summer trekking season. At this time it is advisable to head north to Zanskar and Ladakh.

Ladakh

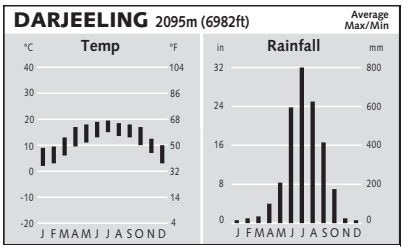
Due to its northerly aspect, the snows remain at higher elevations until the end of May. By late June the daytime temperatures rise and an early start is imperative to escape the harsh UV rays. The adage 'it never rains in Ladakh' in the summer is not entirely true. There is increasing evidence of the occasional monsoon storm surging over the Great Himalaya Range as far north as the Indus Valley and Leh. Autumn is ideal for extended treks with settled conditions throughout most of the region until the onset of the winter snows in late October.

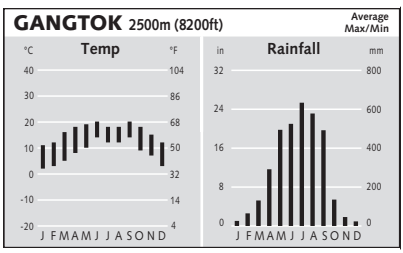
Kashmir

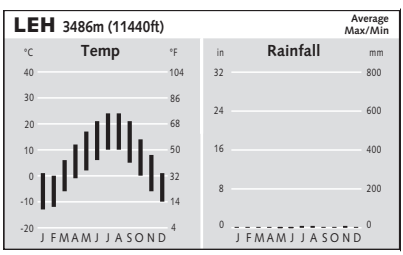
Kashmir's location south of the Great Himalaya Range and yet north of the Pir Panjal ensures it has a modified monsoon climate. Spring is delightful, although heavy snow may preclude some of the extended treks over high passes. In July and August you must be prepared for the occasional heavy storm. As with most other regions of the Himalaya, the autumn period through September and October is ideal for trekking.

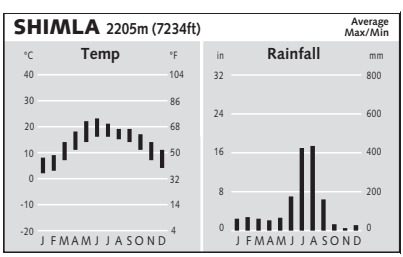
Himachal Pradesh

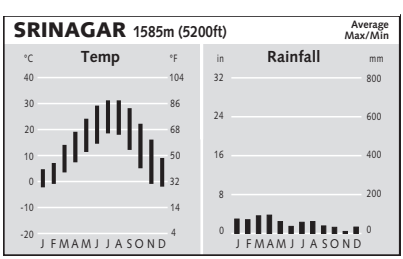
The state straddles the Himalaya divide. Regions to the north of the range include Spiti which has a climate similar to Ladakh. The nearby region of Lahaul is located south of the Himalaya divide but north of the Pir Panjal. Lahaul therefore has a modified monsoon climate as the region escapes the full impact of the monsoon rains. The regions of Dharamsala, Brahmaur plus Manali and the Kullu Valley are subject to the full brunt of the monsoon, creating two distinct trekking seasons – pre-monsoon (May and June) and post-monsoon (September and October).











Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand has two distinct trekking seasons: the pre-monsoon in May and June, and the post-monsoon season from the middle of September until the end of October. The region is subject to monsoon rains in July and August. However, for the botanist the monsoon brings its own rewards as the fabled Valley of the Flowers, the nearby *bugyals* (high-altitude meadows) are carpeted with wildflowers at this time.

Darjeeling & Sikkim

The East Himalaya trekking season commences in May as soon as the snow melts on the higher elevations (above 4000m) and continues to the middle of June when the region is subject to the first of the heavy monsoon rains. The monsoon continues unabated until early October (far later than in Himachal and Uttarakhand). The post-monsoon season extends until the middle of November when the first snows settle on the higher passes.

More information is included in the When to Trek section (p21) as well details of each region included in the trekking chapters.

Weather Information

For a five-day forecast before heading off on the trail check www.weather.nic.in with covers most regions. There are daily weather reports in the Indian newspapers including the *Times of India* and *Indian Express*.

CUSTOMS

Visitors are allowed to bring 1L, each of wine and spirits and 200 cigarettes into India duty-free. Officials may occasionally ask tourists to enter expensive items such as video cameras and laptop computers on a 'Tourist Baggage Re-export' form to ensure they are taken out of India when you depart.

Technically you're supposed to declare cash over US$5000 or travellers cheques over US$10,000 on arrival. Indian rupees can be exchanged at the airport before departure into US dollars or other hard currencies.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The question uppermost on anyone's mind prior to taking the trick is, is it safe? The chances of encountering an avalanche or falling into a crevasse while trekking are minimal. Wild animals also pose minimal danger. However while attacks on trekkers have been rare for many seasons, it is recommended that trekkers engage the services of a local agent to insure against the unlikely chance of a violent attack.

It is also necessary to know that most government travel warnings advise tourists not to visit Kashmir. While this warning also includes Jammu, it does not refer to Ladakh, which has not experienced the political unrest found in the Kashmir Valley.

Theft is not commonplace, although it is best not to leave a display of valuables unattended at your campsite; the temptation may prove too much for the village children. Boots, together with your washing, should always be brought inside the tent at night. It is best to lock your kitbag, although the chances of gear disappearing once it is packed up for the day are minimal.

A money belt worn around your waist beneath your clothes is one of the safest ways to carry important documents such as your passport and money. It's worth placing these inside a plastic bag for rain protection.

It is advisable to keep an eye on all your gear at bus and railway stations. Do not leave money in your hotel room; always keep your travellers cheques separate from your cheque receipts; and keep an emergency supply of US$50 or US$100 separate from your money belt.

DISCOUNT CARDS

Full-time students can get discount fares on airlines but that is about it. Bargain for everything else.

EMBASSIES & CONSULTATES

Indian Embassies Abroad

The following represent just some of India's missions worldwide – see www.meaindia.nic.in (click on 'Missions and Posts Abroad' link) for more listings including consulates.

Australia (☎ 02 6273 3999; www.hcindia-au.org; 3-5 Moonah Place, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)
Canada (☎ 613 744-3751; www.hciottawa.ca; 10 Springfield Rd, Ottawa, Ontario K1M 1C9)
France (☎ 01 40 50 70 70; www.amb-inde.fr; 15 Rue Alfred Dehodencq, 75016 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030 257 950; www.indianembassy.de; Tiergartenstrasse 17, 10785 Berlin)
Ireland (☎ 030 257 950; www.indianembassy.ie; 6 Leeson Park, Dublin 6)
Israel (☎ 03 5291999; www.indembassy.co.il; 140 Hayarkon St, Tel Aviv 61033)
Japan (☎ 03 3262 2391; www.embassyofindiajapan.org; 2-2-11 Kudan Minami, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 1020074)
Nepal (☎ 014 410900; www.south-asia.com/embassy-india; 336 Kapurdhara Marg, Kathmandu)
Netherlands (☎ 070 346 9771; www.indianembassy.nl; Buitenrustweg 2, 2517 KD, The Hague)
New Zealand (☎ 04 473 6390; www.hicomind.org.nz; 180 Molesworth St, Wellington)
Pakistan (☎ 0512 206950; G5 Diplomatic Enclave, Islamabad)
UK (☎ 020 7836 8484; www.hcilondon.net; India House, Aldwych, London WC2B 4NA)
USA (☎ 202 939 7000; www.indianembassy.org; 2107 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in India

Most foreign diplomatic missions can be found in Delhi. Most missions operate normal business hours from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, with a lunch break from 1pm to 2pm, but there are also some consulates in the other major cities, including Kolkata (☎ 033).

To find contact details for missions of other countries in Delhi, see the local phone directory or pick up the free *Delhi Diary* magazine in India.

Australia (☎ 011 41399900; www.ausgovindia.com; 1/50G Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)
Canada (☎ 011 41782000; www.canada-internationl.gc.ca/india-inde; 7/8 Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)
France (☎ 011 24196100; www.france-in-india.org; 2/50-E Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)
Germany (☎ 011 268718371; www.new-delhi.diplo.de; 6/50G Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)
Ireland (☎ 011 24626741; www.irelandinindia.com; 230 Jor Bagh, Delhi)
Israel (☎ 011 30414500; www.delhi.mfa.gov.il; 3 Aurangzeb Rd, Delhi)
Japan (☎ 011 26876564; www.in.emb-japan.go.jp; 50-G Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)
Nepal (☎ 011 23327361; Barakhamba Rd, Delhi)
Netherlands (☎ 011 24197600; www.holland-in-india.org; 6/50F Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)
New Zealand (☎ 011 26883170; www.nzembassy.com; 50N Nyaya Marg, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)
UK (☎ 011 24192100;www.ukindia.com; Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)
USA (☎ 011 24198000; http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov; Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, Delhi)

FOOD

A healthy diet makes for a healthy trek. By adopting the best of the local food and using a little imagination or a good local cook, delicious meals can be prepared that will enhance your trekking experience.

Local Food

Besides the fruit and vegetables available in the local markets, fresh meat, eggs, pulses, cheese, ghee, flour and rice are widely available across India. Butter and dried milk are available in tins. Nuts and raisins, honey, peanut butter, jams, tea and coffee, sugar, biscuits and chocolate can also be purchased. The cost of locally produced food, such as rice, flour, fruit, vegetables and pulses is low; while the meat, tinned goods, butter, cheese, fish and dried fruit are on a par with European prices. However, for snacks on the trek, bring a stock of dried fruit; Indian dried fruit is both expensive and of an inferior quality. This can be mixed with nuts and chocolate. Other suggested items include packets of dried soup, herbal teas and energy bars. Australian groups often bring Vegemite while British groups often bring Marmite to give that extra dimension to *puri*, *paratha* and *chapati* (all breads).

On the Trek

If you are making your own arrangements, remember that the tea-house trekking style is nowhere near as developed as it is in Nepal – if you intend to stay in houses,

TREKKERS' CUISINE

Eric Shipton, the British explorer who specialised in small, lightweight expeditions in the Himalaya, reduced his requirements to just oatmeal. Food was simply calculated by multiplying the number of days by the quantity of oatmeal needed per day. Apparently, he spent considerable time debating whether salt was a luxury that could be dispensed with. For us lesser mortals, it is easy to exist quite happily for three or four weeks at a time on a substantial diet of porridge, *puris* and honey in the morning; with daytime snacks of nuts, raisins and tea; and an evening meal of rice, dhal and vegetables. On such treks, there is little need for freeze-dried, tinned or packaged food.

The author shares this admirable view and on a recent five-month trek reduced his diet to rice and dhal for the first two months. On reaching Ladakh a steaming bowl of *thukpa* (noodle soup) helped to satisfy the enormous appetites that built up during the day. For those wishing to share the author's culinary delights, the recipe is as follows:

1 Heat a large saucepan of water. When it boils add a handful of shredded cucumber.
2 Add a helping of chopped meat.
3 Add salt, coriander, red chilli powder, mixed masala, turmeric, black pepper plus fresh garlic and green chilli and boil for 20 minutes.
3 Chop turnips and cook in pressure cooker.
5 Add cooked turnip plus a sprinkling of flour to thicken the broth.
6 Add noodles (in this case torn-up slices of flour mixed with water, as you would do when making a chapati) and boil for five to 10 minutes. Simmer for a further 30 minutes and it is ready to serve.
7 Wash down with a liberal amount of Old Monk rum.

don't expect the gastronomic delights that you find on some routes in the Annapurna or Everest regions. Indeed, if you are trekking in Ladakh, often the only local food available is *tsampa* (roasted ground barley), butter tea, plus a few vegetables and dried apricots. In each trekking chapter there is reference to the food available locally and at the trailhead.

It is important to have a balanced diet of carbohydrates, proteins and fats on the trek; it is equally important not to miss the delicacies of Indian cooking. Try delicious *puris* or *parathas* with honey for breakfast, instead of white bread and biscuits. A succulent mutton curry, cooked with local vegetables and dhal, is more appetising and interesting than roast mutton and boiled vegetables. Sausages, beans and chips may be OK, but a simple chicken or vegetable *pulao* (savoury rice) for lunch, with chutneys and local curd, tastes so much better.

Buying Food

The local markets you visit before starting your trek normally stock an adequate supply of grains and vegetables. It is usually possible to purchase fruit and vegetables that will not perish on the trek (eg cabbages, cauliflowers, potatoes, onions and carrots as well as apples and pears, and apricots in Ladakh). If you employ a cook then accompany them on their visit to the market. Not only will you get a great idea of what is available, but it will also give you further insights into market life, and possibly a few more friendships.

Cooking

If you are going to do your own cooking you will need a kerosene stove and an adequate supply of kerosene. You should ensure that you also have enough for your porters or mule attendants. You will also need to acquire a stock of pots and pans (sold by weight for a few dollars) in the local market before setting off on your trek.

GUIDES & PORTERS

Carrying your own gear and being self-sufficient is not difficult on short treks where the load is light and the stages easy. On a long trek, your backpack may weigh you down to the point where you see more of your feet than the mountains. It is one

thing to carry your own gear for a few days, but quite another to carry it for two weeks or more. Of course, this ultimately depends on your fitness and experience of mountain areas. Many trekkers compromise by hiring porters or a horse attendant to help carry the load. See also the box 'Lodge-based Trekking in India', p202.

Guides

A guide hired through a local agency can make or break a trek. Given the lack of professional standards, you can anticipate a vast range of competency. Unless you are hiring from an established agency you may be taking a risk. Before committing yourself ask the agency whether the guide you are hiring has completed a HIM basic mountaineering course or equivalent; whether the guide has had any medical training: his level of education (important to determine their level of English); their years of experience and for how many years he has been employed by the agency.

Porters/Mule Attendants

A recommendation from a reputable agency (even though it will result in an increased fee) is a good investment. It puts the agency's reputation on the line and ensures that you will cover the required stages in the time agreed and for a fair rate.

Insurance

This is vitally important. Best again to hire through an agency. If you hire independently then you are on your own. Given the lack of infrastructure it is unlikely that you will be able to obtain insurance locally. You could therefore be faced with a high bill should the mule attendant lose a mule or a porter sustain an injury.

Wages

The payment level for a guide and mule attendant will vary enormously. In most regions there is a local minimum rate drawn up each year by the local mule-attendants association. Porters are also conscious of the going rate. However, everything is negotiable. Do not however employ a guide or porter based simply on what appears to be the most economical. It seldom works out that way. A guide should be paid a minimum of Rs 500/$12.50 per day although some of the professional guides, particularly from Delhi, can charge up to Rs 3000 per day. Porters can be hired from Rs 250

INTERNATIONAL PORTER PROTECTION GROUP

The **IPPG** (www.ippg.net) was founded in the late 1990s to provide support for the porters hired to work with trekking groups. The movement aimed to improve working conditions for porters and reduce the number of deaths and injuries due to inadequate clothing and equipment.

The group initially focused on Nepal, with the aim of increasing awareness of the plight of the porter and the responsibilities of trekking agencies and individuals.

IPPG hopes the following guidelines will be adopted by trekking agencies in India.

- Adequate clothing should be available for protection in bad weather and at altitude. This should include footwear, hat, gloves, windproof jacket and trousers, sunglasses, and access to a blanket and sleeping pad above the snowline.
- Group leaders and trekkers should provide the same standard of medical care for porters as they would expect for themselves.
- Porters should not be paid off because of illness without the leader or trekkers being informed.
- Sick porters should never be sent down alone, but with someone who speaks their language and understands the problem.
- Sufficient funds should be provided to sick porters to cover land rescue and treatment.

If your trekking arrangements are being handled by an agent, insist they follow these guidelines. If you are making your own arrangements, it is imperative that you also follow the guidelines and accept responsibility for the welfare of your porters.

per day upwards while mule attendants can charge anything from Rs 300 per day per mule plus return charges. However, during the peak season or during the autumn harvest period, rates can double or even triple overnight.

WHERE TO HIRE GUIDES & PORTERS

You have a choice of engaging a guide through a recognised trekking agency in Delhi or closer to the trekking-off point. If going through a Delhi agency you should be aware that most agencies are now bound by state legislation to subcontract their hiring through a local agency. It therefore begs the question as to what value a Delhi agency offers. An alternative is to make an arrangement through an adventure-travel agency before you leave home. This will at least give you some comeback if the guide and porter package doesn't meet expectations. However, it is recommended that if you take this course of action that you go through a well-established adventure-travel company.

HOLIDAYS

While there are many public holidays in India, which often coincide with main festivals throughout the year, most will have little or no effect on your trekking plans.

Holi (Feb/Mar) One of the most colourful (literally) of the Hindu festivals, with people marking the end of winter by throwing coloured water and red powder over each other.

Id-ul-Zuhara A Muslim festival commemorating Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. (Events on the Muslim calendar fall about 11 days earlier each year. In 2009 it is held on 27 November. In 2010 it is held on 16 November.

Buddha Jayanti (May/Jun) The Buddha's birth, enlightenment and attainment of Nirvana (earthly release) are all celebrated. On the Hindu calendar it is referred to as Wesak, while Tibetans and Ladakhi refer to the date as the Saka Dawa. The festivals are celebrated during full moon, but since the Ladakhi people keep different calendars, the festivals do not necessarily coincide with the same full moon.

Independence Day (15 Aug) The anniversary of India's independence from Britain in 1947. Avoid places such as Delhi and Kolkata as the large crowds and variable security have the potential to be the target of terrorist attacks.

Dussehra (Oct) The most important Hindu festival, this 10-day event celebrates the Ramayana, commencing on the first day of the Hindu month of Asvina. Shops are closed and it is difficult to find trek crew.

Diwali (Oct/Nov) Celebrated on the 15th day of the month of Kartika. At night many oil lamps are lit as a symbol of their original purpose of showing Rama (an incarnation of Vishnu) the way home from his period of exile. In Kolkata, the festival is also dedicated to Kali (goddess of destruction), lasting five days.

Ramadan The most important event in the Muslim year, this is a 30-day dawn-to-dusk fast. It was during this month that the prophet Mohammed had the Quran revealed to him in Mecca. In 2009 it is from 21 August to 19 September; in 2010 it is from 11 August to 8 September.

Local Festivals

These festivals may also interrupt, and enhance, your plans:

WATER

The adage 'don't drink the water' should be remembered at all times while trekking in India. Putting iodine in the water or boiling it at night for use the following day is the most satisfactory option. See Water (p236) for more details.

Even when you are trekking way above the villages there is a need to be wary of the crystal-clear stream. Always assume that shepherds and their animals are above your water source. The only exception is if you discover a spring line – a place where the water comes straight out of the ground high on an alpine pasture. Even there you must ensure that you fill your water bottle straight from the source and not at a lower point where the supply may already be contaminated. It is also necessary to ensure that you do not inadvertently contaminate the local water supply. This is especially relevant in Ladakh, where water sources are often limited.

Ladakh: (mid-Jun–early Jul) A famous Buddhist cham (masked dance) festival, the Hemis festival commemorates Padmasambhava's birthday. It's on the 10th day of the 6th month of the Tibetan calendar.
Himachal Pradesh: (Oct) The Dussehra festival in the Kullu Valley celebrates Rama's victory over the demon king Ravana. The festival continues for a week and commences on the tenth day of the rising moon, known as Vijay Dashmi.
Uttarakhand (late Apr-early May) The temples at Yamunotri and Gangotri are opened on the religious day of Akshaya-Tritya, and remain open till the Diwali festival in October. The temples at Kedarnath and Badrinath open around the same time.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafes are widespread in most Himalayan towns. Most charge between Rs 8/US$0.20c to Rs 20/US$0.50c an hour. Some hotels will also allow you to access their internet. Power shortages can cause frustrations, while the speed of some connections can be slow. Once on the trek there are few if any connections in the villages, at least for the time being. Details are included in the town section in the trekking chapters.

MAPS

Buying Maps

Do not assume that you can purchase good trekking maps in India despite the prevalence of the activity. If you are buying any of the above maps, contact one of the specialist map shops. Plan ahead, as they may need a month or longer to order it.

Edward Stanford Ltd (☎020 7836 1321; www.stanfords.co.uk; 12-14 Long Acre, Covent Garden London WC2E)
Map Land (☎03 9557 8555; www.map-pland.com.au; 408 Centre Rd, Bentleigh, VIC 3204, Aust)
Maplink (☎800 627 7768; www.maplink.com; 30 S La Patera Lane, Unit 5, Santa Barbara, CA 93117)
Melbourne Map Centre (☎03 9569 5472; www.melbmap.com.au; 740 Waverley Rd, East Malvern, VIC 3145, Aust).

Another useful reference is the **Ground Survey of India** (www.surveyofindia.gov.in) although most of their detailed sections are classified. Also contact the **Himalayan Club** (www.himalayanclub.org) who may be able to assist with a relevant section.

Alternatively contact your state or national library who are often able to photocopy map sections that are hard to locate or no longer commercially available.

Large-scale Maps

The US Military U502 series of topographical maps covers many of the main trekking regions in India. These can be used in conjunction with the comprehensive Leomann series (1987); and the Air India trekking maps, which are upgraded versions of the state-government trekking maps compiled in the early 1980s. In the introduction for each trek, the relevant map is indicated, together with other useful references.

US Military U502 Series 1:250,000 Based on the Survey of India these were revised

PLACE NAMES

There are many variations between the place names listed in this book and names in other maps or guides. There is often no universally accepted transliteration of Ladakhi or Hindi names into English.

A number of local terms are used throughout this book. For example, when trekking in Ladakh, we frequently pass Buddhist *mani* walls (stone walls carved with Buddhist prayers) and chortens (reliquaries or shrines to the memory of a Buddhist saint). In Himachal, the wandering shepherds who come from the region of Kangra are known as Gaddis. Gujar shepherds, frequent the less remote valleys in Kashmir, Himachal and Uttarakhand. When staying overnight on a trek, we sometimes stay in PWD huts, Forest Rest Houses or Dak bungalows where the *chowkidar* (caretaker) may be able to arrange dhal bhat (lentils and rice) to eat. In Ladakh, we may finish the evening off with a glass of *rakshi* (rice wine) – in the day, a bucket of *chang* (barley beer) is a less intoxicating refreshment. On some stages in Himachal, we cross a *nullah* (riverbed), while in Ladakh we cross a *la* (pass) in order to traverse a mountain range. See the glossary (p247) for a list of terms.

MAPS IN THIS BOOK

The maps in this book are intended to show the general routes of the treks we describe. They are primarily to help locate the route within the surrounding area. They are not detailed enough in themselves for route finding or navigation. You will still need a properly surveyed map at an adequate scale – specific maps are recommended in the Planning section for each trek. Most chapters also have a regional map showing the gateway towns of cities, principal transport routes and other major features. Map symbols are interpreted in the legend on the inside front cover of this book.

On the maps in this book, natural features such as river confluences and mountain peaks are in their true position, but sometimes the location of villages and routes is not always so. This may be because a village is spread over a hillside, or the size of the map does not allow for detail of the path's twists and turns. However, by using several basic route-finding techniques (see p224), you will have few problems following our descriptions.

by the US military and published in 1948. The original series were in colour and have recently been reprinted.

Leomann Map Series 1:200,000 These ridge and river maps cover most regions of the Indian Himalaya with the trekking routes depicted in three colours. It's best to use these in conjunction with the U502 Series.

Air India Map Series 1:250,000 These were produced some years ago with ridge and river sections useful to trekkers in the Indian Himalaya. The series forms the basis of other maps, including the trekking maps distributed by the Himachal Pradesh government. The sections provide a good introduction and should also be used in conjunction with the U502 series.

Small-scale Maps

Overall maps of the Himalaya include the *Bartholomew* map of the Indian Subcontinent 1:400,000 and the *Nelles Verlag* on the Himalaya 1:1,500,000.

MONEY

The Indian rupee (Rs) is divided into 100 paise. There are coins of five, 10, 20, 25 and 50 paise, and Rs one, two, and five. Notes cover Rs one, two, five, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1000. The Indian rupee has maintained a remarkably stable exchange rate with the US dollar over the last decade. A guide to exchange rates is given in the inside back cover, while there are some pointers on costs on p22. Some foreign currencies are accepted in larger hotels and trekking agencies, however for most other places rupees are the most acceptable method of payment.

ATMs

Debit or credit cards are a godsend. You can use them in many shops and to withdraw cash from ATMs that are now found in most major towns. However, don't rely entirely on ATMs as they can sometimes malfunction. See details in the Information section of the trekking chapters. It is important to note as the last thing you need is to complete a trek and find there is nowhere you can obtain cash to pay for arrangements or for onward transport or hotels.

Credit Cards

Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted, Amex less so. Don't rely on credit cards completely though, and carrying some US dollars is recommended.

Money Changers

There are outlets in many towns and an alternative if an ATM is out of order or has run out of cash. The outlets can provide a cash advance at a competitive exchange rate and for a small service charge.

On the Trek

If organising an inclusive trek through a local agent, check before you arrive in India that the agent accepts payment by credit card. The trek may also be payable in instalments (ie 10% deposit, 60% on arrival and the balance after completing the trek). If trekking independently, you have little option but to carry cash with you.

Don't be too concerned with carrying low-denomination notes. Hundred-rupee notes can normally be changed at *dhabas*

(tea stalls) along the trail, and the bill for porters and horse handlers is likely to run into many hundreds of rupees. Ensure that notes are in good condition. Torn or dirty notes are often not accepted in India, especially in remote regions.

Tipping

Tipping is the custom in India, so you should budget for tips to room boys and helpers who take you around the market, not to mention the host of other people forever coming out of the woodwork to help. See Guides & Porters (p207) for advice on tipping after a trek.

Bargaining is also an integral part of Indian culture. Where there are no fixed prices, the only way to determine the price is to come to a negotiated agreement, which can involve hours of haggling. This may include bargaining over the cost of a trek, porters, transport and other matters such as the number of trek stages. Don't give up or get upset – remember that you will often lose respect if you don't bargain hard. Before bargaining try to get a good idea of the fair price, as once you agree on a price you must stick to it.

PERMITS & FEES

National Park Fees

A fee is levied when entering most of the national parks in the Indian Himalaya. Fees are from Rs 100/US$2.50 per day and around half-price for Indian trekkers. An additional fee (Rs 100 to Rs 500) is also payable for bringing still and movie cameras into the parks. Most permits are issued on entry to the national park. The exception to this is the Source of the Ganges trek in the Gangotri National Park where permits are issued in Uttarkashi. See the trekking chapters for details.

Trekking Permits

Trekking permits are generally not required in India. However some, including the trek to the Milam Glacier in Uttarakhand, require a permit, while the Kinnaur Kailas trek in Himachal, requires an Inner Line permit. See the following for details.

Travel Permits & Restricted Areas

Most of the Himalayan border regions close to Pakistan and China are politically sensitive, and there are Inner Line areas that place restrictions on the movements of foreigners. While restrictions have been eased in the past decade, you are still required to obtain an Inner Line permit if visiting some of the previously restricted areas, particularly in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Details of current regulations are included in the trekking chapters.

The area of Ladakh from 1 mile (1.6km) north of the Leh–Srinagar road is generally regarded as a restricted zone for foreigners, although permission is now granted to visit the Nubra Valley, and the Pangong Lake district north of the Indus Valley. The same restrictions apply to the area 1 mile east of the Leh–Manali road beyond the Baralacha La. However, the Indian government permits organised groups of foreigners to visit the outlying Rupshu area closer to the disputed India-China border. These regulations are always changing so check with the local tourist office or trekking agent before setting off. It should also be noted that certain other areas, such as the Nanda Devi Sanctuary, remain closed for environmental reasons; although some exceptions have been made, the Inner Sanctuary is closed to trekkers.

In the East Himalaya, a permit is required to enter Sikkim. It can be issued in Darjeeling or at the border between Bangla (West Bengal) and Sikkim at Rangpo, while trek permits can be issued in Gangtok.

When travelling anywhere in India, it is advisable to carry your passport with you. This is your only bona fide means of identification, which you will need to show at checkpoints in Ladakh, Zanskar, Lahaul, Spiti and Kinnaur.

TELEPHONE

The telephone system in India has improved to the point where you can be reasonably assured of making an international or interstate phone call without undue delay. Most towns have private STD/ISD call booths with fax facilities and direct dialling for both interstate and overseas. They are quick and efficient, and are connected with a digital metre displaying the cost. Direct international calls cost around Rs 70/US$1.75 per minute depending on the country you are calling, while an interstate call would cost around Rs 30/US$0.75c per minute.

If calling from your hotel, check the rates first. Reverse-charge (collect) calls also attract a service charge from most hotels. The best alternative is to book a call for the minimum three minutes and get your friends or family to call you back.

Mobile Phones

While your mobile phone will be fine in most of the trekking towns, there is very limited reception once on the trek. In the Jammu & Kashmir state it is at present not possible to get a signal, even in the towns, from most overseas mobile phones or even from those purchased in other parts of India. Some trekking companies take satellite phones with them for emergencies.

TIME

India is 5½ hours ahead of GMT /UTC, 4½ hours behind Australian Eastern Standard Time (EST) and10½ hours ahead of American EST. The local standard time is known as IST (Indian Standard Time).

TOURIST INFORMATION

The first stop to getting information about travelling in India is the tourism website of the **Government of India** (www.incredibleindia.org) The website provides contact details of the government overseas offices. The website also has a link to the state tourist offices and the Delhi offices listed below.

The **Government of India Tourist Office** (ITO) branch in Delhi (☎ 011 2332 0342; 88 Janpath, near Connaught Place) provides helpful travelling and accommodation information but is not a reliable source for trekking advice. Tourist offices in Delhi:

Jammu and Kashmir Tourist Office (☎ 011 2334 5373; www.jktourism.org; Kanishka Shopping Plaza, 19 Ashoka Rd) has reliable information about trekking in Ladakh and makes realistic assessments about travelling to Kashmir.

Himachal Pradesh Tourist Development Corporation (HPTDC; ☎ 011 2332 5320; www.hptdc.nic.in; Chandralok Bldg, 36 Janpath) is the place to book seats on HPTDC buses and any HPTDC accommodation. There is, however, a shortage of literature on trekking.

Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal) Tourist Office (☎ 011 23327713; Suite 102, Indraprakash Bldg, 21 Barakhamba Rd) has facilities to book seats on their buses and accommodation through the **Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam** (GMVN; www.gmvn.org) and the **Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam** (KMVN; www.kmvn.org. Both regional offices are state-owned organisations with trekking divisions, who also have offices here. They also have comprehensive brochures on trekking, although some of the information and maps need reviewing.

Bangla (West Bengal) Office (☎ 011 23732840; www.wbtourism.com; A2 State Emporium Complex, Baba Kharak Singh Marg) has rudimentary maps on treks out of Darjeeling.

Sikkim Tourist Office (☎ 011 26115346; www.sikkim.nic.in; New Sikkim House Bldg, 14 Panchsheel Marg, Chanakyapuri)

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Buy a policy that generously covers you for medical expenses, theft or loss of luggage and tickets, and for cancellation of and delays in your travel arrangements. Check your policy does not exclude trekking as a dangerous activity and includes evacuation costs. (Most insurance companies now accept that trekking in the mountains even with the occasional use of ice axe and crampons is different from mountain climbing). Without evacuation cover, rescue by helicopter can be very expensive – US$3000 or more – and a helicopter will not be sent unless the Indian Air Force has some guarantee of payment. Most reputable agencies that run treks to the Himalaya can organise policies to cover emergency evacuation; indeed, many insist that this be taken out as a condition of booking. Do not rely on your consulate or embassy to help in an emergency.

Buy travel insurance as early as possible to ensure you'll be compensated for any unforseen accidents or delays. If items are lost or stolen get a police report immediately – otherwise your insurer might not pay up.

provides general information and elementary trekking maps.

Other useful contacts and websites are included in the trekking chapters although the experienced local trekking agencies do, as a general rule, provide more reliable information about the state of the trails and the trekking options available.

VISAS

People of all nationalities, including British Commonwealth citizens, require a valid passport and visa to enter India. Visas are issued at Indian embassies. They are valid for 120 days and must be obtained no more than six months before your arrival in India. If you are planning to visit a neighbouring country such as Nepal, and return to India, a double/multi-entry visa is necessary.

Note that if you apply to visit Arunachal Pradesh or other politically sensitive regions, your application can take up to three months, and sometimes longer, to process. If you are travelling independently, and have any doubts at all about whether this will hinder your plans, don't apply. Once you have applied to visit one of these regions you cannot reapply for an ordinary tourist visa until your original application has been cleared.

Within India, visas can be extended at the **Foreigners' Registration Office** in Delhi (☎ 011 3319489; Hans Bhavan, Tilak Bridge) or Darjeeling, or at any office of the Superintendent of Police – in Leh, Manali or Mussoorie, for example. The application is usually straightforward.

If you stay in India for more than 120 days, keep your bank exchange certificates as you will need a tax clearance before leaving the country. The clearance certificate is issued by the **Foreigners' Section, Income Tax Office** (☎ 011 3317826; Indraprastha Estate, Delhi). Allow a day to complete formalities.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

Delhi is the main gateway for treks in the West Himalaya including Ladakh, Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. There are also good connections by land and air to Darjeeling and Sikkim if you are coming from the UK or Europe. If travelling from Southeast Asia, Australia or from the west coast of America then Kolkata is an alternative to Delhi when planning a trek to Darjeeling and Sikkim.

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Entering India by air or land is relatively straightforward, with the usual standard immigration and customs procedures (p205) in force.

Passports

To enter India you need a valid passport, visa (p213) and an onward/return ticket. If your passport is lost or stolen, report it to the local police and then contact your country's representative without delay. When travelling across states you may be required to produce your passport and in Jammu and Kashmir register on arrival. You also need a permit to enter Sikkim (p187) that can be obtained beforehand or at the land border.

AIR

Airports & Airlines

The main airport is in **Delhi** (DEL; Indira Gandhi International Airport; ☎ 011 2565 2011; www.delhiairport.com). For treks out of Sikkim, fly into **Kolkata airport** (Calcutta; CCU; Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport; ☎ 033 2511 8787; www.calcuttaairport.com). Many flights from Europe and Southeast Asia/Australia also fly to **Mumbai** (Bombay; BOM; Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport; ☎ 022 2682 9000; www.mumbaiairport.com).

India's national carrier is **Air India** (www.airindia.com) and the state-owned domestic carrier **Indian Airlines** (www.indian-airlines.nic.in) also offers extensive flights to Asia and the Middle East. Private airlines including **Jet Airways** (www.jetairways.com) offers regional flights to Southeast Asia as well as long-haul flights to Europe and America. For details about India's domestic airways see p217.

Other airlines flying to and from India (websites have contact details):

Aeroflot (code SU; www.aeroflot.org) Hub: Sheremetyevo International Airport, Moscow
Air Canada (code AC; www.aircanada.com)
Air France (code AF; www.airfrance.com)
Air India (code AI; www.airindia.com)
American Airlines (code AA; www.aa.com)

THINGS CHANGE

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

Austrian Airlines (code; OS; www.aua.com)
Biman Bangladesh Airlines (code BG; www.binanair.com) Hub: Zia International Airport, Dhaka
British Airways (code BA; www.british-airways.com)
Cathay Pacific Airways (code CX; www.cathaypacific.com)
Druk Air (code KB; www.drukair.com.bt)
El Al Israel Airlines (code LY; www.elal.co.il)
Emirates (code EK; www.emriates.com)
Finnair (code AY; www.finnair.com)
Gulf Air (code GF; www.gulfdair.com)
Japan Airlines (code JL; www.jal.com)
Kenya Airlines (code KQ; www.kenya-airways.com)
KLM- Royal Dutch Airlines (code KL; www.klm.com)
Kuwait Airways (code KU; www.kuwait-airways.com)
Lufthansa Airlines (code LH; www.lufthansa.com)
Malaysia Airlines (code MH; www.malaysiaairlines.com)
Nepal Airlines (code RA; www.royalnepal-airlines.com)
Pakistan International Airlines (code PK; www.piac.com.pk) Hub: Jinnah International Airport, Karachi
Qantas Airways (code QF; www.qantas.com.au)
Qatar Airways (code QR; www.qatarairways.com)
Singapore Airlines (code SQ; www.singaporeair.com)
South African Airlines (code SA; www.flysaa.com)
Sri Lankan Airlines (code UL; www.srilankan.aero) Hub: Bandaranaike International Airport, Colombo
Swiss International Airlines (code LX; www.swiss.com)
Thai Airways (code TG; www.thaiair.com)

Departing India

Most airlines no longer require reconfirmation of international tickets, though its still a good idea to call to check that the flight times haven't changed. Most airlines advise that you check in three hours before international departures, although the checking- in procedures at Delhi airport have been recently upgraded. Remember to request baggage tags for the security checks for all cabin baggage.

Tickets

An onward or return airfare is a condition of the tourist visa, so few visitors buy international tickets inside India. Departures taxes are included in almost all tickets. Surf the web to get up-to-the-minute fares and flight schedules. Note that fares on airline websites are sometimes cheaper than going through an agent. Alternatively, try the following international online ticket agencies:

Ebookers (www.ebookers.com)
Expedia (www.expedia.com)
Flight Centre International (www.flightcentre.com)
Flights.com (www.tiss.com)
STA Travel (www.statravel.com)
Travelocity (www.travelocity.com)

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

STA Travel (☎ 13 47 82; wwws.tatravel.com.au) and **Flight Centre** (☎ 13 31 33; www.flightcentre.com.au) have offices throughout Australia.

In New Zealand also check out **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0800 474 400; www.statravel.co.nz).

UK

Discount airfare is big business in London. Good places to find competitive quotes include the following:

Ebookers (☎ 0871 2335000; www.ebookers.com)
Flight Centre (☎ 0870 4990040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)
STA Travel (☎ 0870 2300040; www.statravel.co.uk)
Trailfinders (☎ 0845 0585858; www.trailfinders.com)
Travel Bag (☎ 0800 08225000; www.travelbag.co.uk)

USA & CANADA

America has plenty of discount travel agents or 'consolidators' particularly in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. Consult travel agents and scan the web for the best deal.

Expedia (www.expedia.com) and **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com) are good sites. Other good places:
American Express Travel (☎ 800 297 2977; www.itn.net)
CheapTickets (www.cheaptickets.com)
Lowestfare.com (www.lowestfare.com)
Orbitz (www.orbitz.com)
STA Travel (☎ 800 781 4040; www.sta.com)

From eastern and western Canada, most flights go via Europe; from Vancouver and the west coast, flights go via Asia. **Travel Cuts** (☎ 800 667 2887; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency and offer the usual range of services, or try the big online agents.

LAND

Crossing between India and Pakistan by land depends on the current state of relations between the two countries. Assuming the crossings are open, the most relevant to the Indian Himalaya is the Attari to Wagah (Amritsar to Lahore) border. Note that you will need to obtain your Pakistan visa and it is strongly recommended to apply in your home country. Regular buses (Rs 20/US$0.50c, one hour, every 30 minutes) run from the border to Amritsar. From Amritsar there are trains direct to Delhi as well as to Pathankot for onward connections to Himachal Pradesh or Kashmir. Note that the much celebrated bus route from Srinagar to Pakistan is currently only open to Indian travellers.

From Siliguri, the major transport hub en route to Darjeeling and Sikkim, it is only one hour to the Indian border town of Paniktanki. Sharing a jeep is the best option, followed by a cycle-rickshaw across the border to Kakarbhitta. Entry visas to Nepal (Rs 1000/US$25) can be obtained on the border. Daily buses run between Kakarbhitta and Kathmandu (18 hours). An alternative from Darjeeling is to hire a taxi that is licensed to travel across the border to the airport at Biratnagar. The fare should be about Rs 2400/US$60. If you depart Darjeeling mid-morning, this will connect you with the early afternoon flights to Kathmandu. These flights can be booked through travel agents in Darjeeling.

GETTING AROUND

AIR

There are only a small number of airports in the Indian Himalaya. From Delhi the services include flights to Srinagar and Jammu in Jammu & Kashmir state, and Leh in Ladakh. The airport at Leh is the most important for trekkers during summer. The flights require good visibility for landing, and for many years after the flights were introduced there were more cancellations than actual flights. Nowadays with a number of airlines, including Jet Airways, JetLite and Indian Airlines, operating early morning flights, the odds are far better and generally flights would only be cancelled around once a month. It is also a year-round service, providing an invaluable lifeline for Ladakhi people in the winter when the road passes to Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir are under deep snow. In Himachal there is the airport at Bhuntar, about 50km south of Manali and Gaggal, and 15km south of Dharamsala. From Kolkata the services include flights to Bagdogra, 90km south of Darjeeling and 114km south of Gangtok.

BUS

Government-run bus companies operate in each state in the Indian Himalaya, and their services are supplemented by private buses.

Between Delhi and the more popular regions such as the hill stations, there is often a choice between luxury buses, some with reclining seats and air conditioning. The more rudimentary, bone-shaking buses are not usually recommended for getting to the hills, although they are often the only alternative when travelling from the hill stations to the trekking-off point.

Most buses to the hill stations depart from Delhi or Kolkata in the evening and drive overnight, ensuring that you feel like a dried-up spider by the time you reach your destination. Any notion of sleeping at night or serenity in the day is interrupted by the blaring of the bus horn or the driver playing the latest Bollywood movie hits at maximum volume.

CAR

While it is possible to rent cars in major centres such as Delhi and Kolkata, this is not normally a realistic option. First, driving on Indian roads requires skills that take a lifetime to perfect. Secondly, if you have an accident, it can take an inordinate amount of time to sort out insurance, file police reports etc.

The normal and by far the most sane alternative is to hire a car and a driver. With the fare shared between four people it's not overly expensive, particularly if you are on a tight travelling schedule. It's easy to hire a car and driver, either from the local state tourist authority, at a private taxi stand or through your hotel.

To give an indication of costs, to hire a car from Delhi to Manali one way would cost Rs 12,000/US$300 to Rs 15,000/US$375 depending on the size of vehicle. Overnight charges also need to be factored in, although most drivers tend to sleep in their vehicles while they are away.

LOCAL TRANSPORT TO/FROM TREKS

Once you reach the hill station or main town in the hills, the next step is travelling to the road head to commence your trek. There are a variety of options; see the Planning section of each trek for details.

Bus

This is the least expensive option. On ordinary buses the number of people seated generally exceeds the number of seats. Expect the usual mounds of luggage and livestock to be stored under the seat, and at least some of the passengers (the ones next to you) to suffer from travel sickness. The timetables are not always strictly adhered to, while the journey is often frustratingly slow with numerous stops. This is, however, all part of the experience.

It is important that you arrive early to catch the bus. Not because it will ever arrive or depart early, but simply to secure a seat. At some stations, tickets are issued in advance, but this does not guarantee your seat. The only way to secure your seat is to get on the bus first. When the bus arrives, it is recommended some of your party load all the trekking baggage onto the roof while the others get on the bus and reserve the seats.

Taxi

If you have a lot of baggage and want to save time, consider hiring a taxi to get to the trekking-off point. If you share the cost between three or four people, this is a viable option. Even for one or two people, the cost is still reasonable considering the convenience. A journey that may take a complete day by bus can often take only a few hours by taxi.

There are taxi stands in most towns in the Indian Himalaya. Most drivers belong to a co-operative or union so that fares are standardised and displayed at the taxi booth. In Ladakh and the Kullu Valley, the rates are fixed and it is difficult to negotiate. Nevertheless, there's no harm in trying before you commence your journey. The Uttarakhand the fare is calculated at around Rs 20/US$0.50c to Rs 30/US$0.75c per kilometre although this is open to negotiation and will depend on the number of passengers and the amount of baggage.

Alternatively, there are shared taxi arrangements in most of the towns of Uttarakhand. You pay for a seat (normally not too much more expensive than the regular bus) and wait until the vehicle is full. The front two passenger seats are generally more expensive. The back seats designed for five or six passengers will often squeeze in a few more plus baggage and a few chickens etc.

Shared jeeps are available in Siliguri, some of the major towns in the Bangla hills, including Darjeeling, and in the main towns in Sikkim. Rates are two to three times higher than the bus fare. For details refer to the Getting There and Away section of the trekking chapters.

Road Conditions

Probably the one factor that puts the fear of God into the intrepid trekker is the precarious nature of India's roads. While most are remarkable feats of engineering, they are frequently unsealed, always narrow, invariably winding and sometimes precariously perched on mountains with precipitous drops that plunge hundreds of metres to the valley floor.

During the monsoon season (mid-Jun to mid-Sep), the roads can be washed away or rendered impassable by landslides. Flexibility is the key to travelling at this time and a few days should be reserved while

you wait for the landslide to be cleared. Transshipping is the normal means to get around a roadblock – you carry your gear over or around the landslide where vehicles on the far side will ferry you onto the next town or bus station. Chai stalls often spring up on each side of the roadblock to provide refreshments to drenched and mud-caked passengers. Porters will also be on hand, diverting from their task of clearing the blockage to assist with the more lucrative job of carrying passengers' excess baggage.

Road Rules

To further complicate the precarious nature of India's roads, most drivers observe few road rules. Perhaps the most perplexing habit is the use of the horn, which is blasted at regular intervals throughout the journey. You will also be kept busy, be it keeping the driver awake during times of boredom or warning oncoming traffic that there are no brakes (or if they have, they aren't going to use them!).

Overtaking provides another dimension to your journey. The rule in the hills seems to be 'overtake all and sundry, in particular any vehicle that has just overtaken you'. Any quest to overtake on a blind corner – on a steep hill or any other dangerous section of the highway – is treated as a divine right. Giving way to oncoming traffic comes second to the more acceptable rule of giving way to uphill traffic – this is faithfully observed, unless your bus is larger or faster than the one coming in the opposite direction.

However, there are some rules and it is now illegal not to wear a seatbelt if travelling in the front seat of the car. Although this is not strictly enforced in the hills, it can lead to a fine, particularly in Delhi and some of the gateway towns.

HITCHING

Hitching is never safe in any country and we normally don't recommend it. However, in India, hitching a ride to get from a remote location, after completing a trek for instance, is a legitimate form of travel – and the driver will expect to be paid. This form of transport is particularly popular where there is a shortage of buses or other public transport, (eg after completing a trek in Ladakh or Zanskar); when travelling along the road between Leh and Manali; and between Manali and Spiti. The normal method is to flag down the driver with your hand. If the vehicle stops, the driver will want to know where you are going and how much you are willing to pay. The fare will be approximately the same as the bus. Once this has been agreed on, the driver's assistant will help you load your baggage and ensure you have time to clamber onto the roof of the truck or get seated in the driver's cabin.

Concerns about safety are usually unfounded, bar the usual concerns about the driver's road skills and the state of the roads. As a precaution, women should not travel without a companion. It may also be wise to note the number of the truck just in case your baggage goes missing.

TRAIN

Travelling by Indian trains is always an experience. They also provide an ideal opportunity to break your journey to the Himalayan foothills. Rather than travelling all the way to Himachal or Uttarakhand by road, consider these special high-speed trains:

The Shatabdi from Delhi to Chandigarh (for onward travel to the Kullu Valley or Dharamsala); Rishikesh (for Uttarkashi and Joshimath); Dehra Dun (for Mussoorie); and Kathgodam (for Naini Tal and Almora).

The Rajdhani travels from Delhi to New Jalpaiguri, which is the railhead for Bangla (West Bengal) and Sikkim.

See the Gateway City chapter for full details.

There are, however, very few railway lines in the Himalayan regions. Most are narrow-gauge and of novelty value rather than a means of long-distance travel. They include the trains servicing Shimla and Darjeeling.

Get a timetable before travelling. Indian Railways publishes its timetable at www.indianrail.gov.in. On arrival in India, refer to the daily newspapers such as the *Indian Express* and the *Times of India*. They publish the details and seat availability of all the main trains departing from Delhi.

Classes & Reservations

There are generally two classes – first and second – but there are a number of

variations. There are air-conditioned (AC) options, (eg the AC chair car, which is the normal seating arrangement for the high-speed Shatabdi trains). Other trains offer a remarkable choice (AC first class, first class, AC two-tier sleeper, AC three-tier sleeper, second-class sleeper, second-class reserved seat and second class). Not all classes are available on all trains. The AC classes are normally reserved for major trains and routes, but it is these that you normally take when travelling to the foothills or from Delhi/Kolkata to New Jalpaiguri.

Prices vary accordingly. For example, the fare for the AC second class is double the standard 1st-class fare; the AC two-tier sleeper fare is 20% higher than first class; and the AC chair fare is about 55% of the first-class fare. The second-class fares are around 25% of the first-class fare.

No reservations are required for general (2nd class) compartments. You can reserve seats in all chair car, sleeper, 1AC, 2AC and 3AC carriages up to 60 days in advance at any station that has a computerised booking system. Advance booking are strongly recommended for all overnight journeys.

The reservation system is quite simple: obtain a reservation slip from the information window and after completing it join the queue at the ticket window where your ticket will be printed. In larger cities there are dedicated windows for foreigners and credit-card payments. A special tourist quota is set aside for foreign tourists travelling between popular stations. Payments can now be made either in Indian rupees, British pounds, US dollars or euros or by credit card. Alternatively, book through any authorised travel agent in India that has access to computerised bookings. A small service charge is levied, but in terms of time saved it is a handy option.

Internet bookings are also possible at **Indian Railways** (www.irctc.co.in) where you can purchase an e-ticket.

Reserved tickets show your seat/berth number (or wait-list number if no seats are available) and the carriage number. When the train pulls in, keep an eye out for the carriage number on the side of the train. Alternatively, engage a railway porter to carry your baggage and he will look after you until you are well and truly seated. He will expect a tip of around Rs 100, but that will vary on the time he has to wait with you before the train arrives, the number of bags he will balance on his head and the train location – at New Delhi station you will need to bargain hard.

Clothing & Equipment

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You don't need to spend a fortune on gear to enjoy the outdoors, but you do need to think carefully about what you pack to make sure you're comfortable and prepared for an emergency. Taking the right clothing and equipment on a trek can make the difference between an enjoyable trek and a cold and miserable one; in extreme situations, it can even mean the difference between life and death.

CLOTHING

Considerations differ widely from trek to trek. On a short hike of a few days, you are likely to trek in shorts, a cotton shirt, warm pullover, sandshoes and a sun hat, plus a good jacket. However, on an extended trek involving a number of passes, it is imperative that you carry comprehensive gear.

One of the most important considerations is the type of trek you choose. If you are using packhorses, weight is not such an issue as when carrying all your gear in a backpack. The checklist must therefore be interpreted with a degree of flexibility. Experienced walkers will already have an idea of what they need, but for those with less experience the following hints may prove useful.

A trek is not a fashion parade and is an ideal time to give a last wearing to cotton T-shirts or an old pair of running shoes. Remember that most of the clothing that you would take on a weekend walk is suitable for trekking the Himalayan foothills. Don't be daunted by going to the Himalaya; the weather conditions are probably on par with the conditions of most mountain regions of the world. With this in mind, purchase gear that you will be able to use when you return home. We recommend spending as much as you can afford on walking boots, a windproof, waterproof jacket and a synthetic pile jacket. These are the most expensive items but are a sound investment, as they should last for many seasons after your trek.

The list is not exhaustive; for more advice, visit outdoor stores, talk to fellow trekkers and read product reviews in outdoor magazines. Some cultural consideration must also be observed. Neither men nor women should wear high-cut shorts. Women should wear trekking pants and loose tops. Nudity is unacceptable, and a swimsuit must be worn when bathing, even in remote locations.

Layering

A secret of comfortable walking is to wear several layers of light clothing, which you can easily take off or put on as you warm up or cool down. Most walkers use three main layers: a base layer next to the skin; an insulating layer; and an outer, shell layer for protection from wind, rain and snow.

For the upper body, the base layer is typically a shirt of synthetic material such as polypropylene, with its ability to wick moisture away from the body and reduce chilling. The insulating layer retains heat next to your body, and is often a windproof synthetic fleece or down jacket. The outer shell consists of a waterproof jacket that also protects against cold wind.

For the lower body, the layers generally consist of either shorts or loose-fitting trousers, polypropylene 'long-john' underwear and waterproof overtrousers.

NAVIGATION EQUIPMENT

Maps & Compass

You should always carry a map of the area you are trekking in (see Maps, p210, and know how to read it. Before setting off on your trek, ensure that you understand the map symbols, plus the main ridge and river systems in the area. Also familiarise yourself with the true north–south directions and the general direction in which you are heading. On the trail, try to identify major landforms, such as mountain ranges and gorges, and locate them on your map. This

HOW TO USE A COMPASS

This is a very basic introduction to using a compass and will only be of assistance if you are proficient in map reading. For simplicity, it doesn't take magnetic variation into account. Before using a compass we recommend you obtain further instruction.

1. Reading a Compass

Hold the compass flat in the palm of your hand. Rotate the bezel so the red end of the needle points to the N on the bezel. The bearing is read from the dash under the bezel.

2. Orienting the Map

To orient the map so that it aligns with the ground, place the compass flat on the map. Rotate the map until the needle is parallel with the map's north/south grid lines and the red end is pointing to north on the map. You can now identify features around you by aligning them with labelled features on the map.

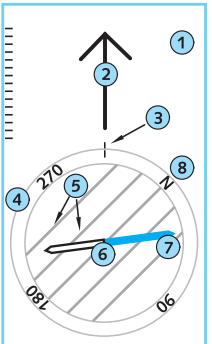
3. Taking a Bearing from the Map

Draw a line on the map between your starting point and your destination. Place the edge of the compass on this line with the direction of travel arrow pointing towards your destination. Rotate the bezel until the meridian lines are parallel with the north/south grid lines on the map and the N points to north on the map. Read the bearing from the dash.

4. Following a Bearing

Rotate the bezel so that the intended bearing is in line with the dash. Place the compass flat in the palm of your hand and rotate the base plate until the red end points to N on the bezel. The direction of travel arrow will now point in the direction you need to walk.

1 Base plate
2 Direction of travel arrow
3 Dash
4 Bezel
5 Meridian lines
6 Needle
7 Red end
8 N (north point)



5. Determining your Bearing

Rotate the bezel so the red end points to the N. Place the compass flat in the palm of your hand and rotate the base plate until the direction of travel arrow points in the direction in which you have been trekking. Read your bearing from the dash.

will give you a better understanding of the region's geography.

Buy a compass and learn how to use it. The attraction of magnetic north varies in different parts of the world, so compasses need to be balanced accordingly. Compass manufacturers have divided the world into five zones. Make sure your compass is balanced for your destination zone. There are also 'universal' compasses on the market that can be used anywhere in the world.

GPS

Originally developed by the US Department of Defense, the Global Positioning System (GPS) is a network of more than 20 earth-orbiting satellites that continually beam encoded signals back to earth. Small, computer-driven devices (GPS receivers) can decode these signals to give users an extremely accurate reading of their location – to within 30m – anywhere on the planet, at any time of day, in almost any weather. The cheapest hand-held GPS receivers now cost less than US$100 (although these may not have a built-in averaging system that minimises signal errors). Other important factors to consider when buying a GPS receiver are its weight and battery life.

Remember that a GPS receiver is of little use to trekkers unless used with an accurate

EQUIPMENT CHECK LIST

This list is a general guide to the things you might take on a trek. Your list will vary depending on the kind of trekking you undertake, whether you are camping or planning to stay in lodges, and on the terrain, weather conditions and the time of the year.

CLOTHING

- boots and spare laces
- gaiters
- gloves and balaclava
- jacket (windproof and waterproof)
- overtrousers (windproof and waterproof)
- runners (training shoes), sandals or thongs (flip flops)
- shorts and trousers or skirt
- socks and underwear
- sunhat
- fleece or down jacket
- thermal underwear
- T-shirt and long-sleeved shirt with collar

EQUIPMENT

- backpack with liner (waterproof)
- first-aid kit (see p230)
- food and snacks (high-energy) and one day's emergency supplies
- insect repellent
- map, compass and guidebook
- map case or clip-seal plastic folders
- pocket knife
- sunglasses
- suncreen and lip balm
- survival bag or blanket
- toilet paper and trowel
- torch (flashlight) or headlamp, spare batteries and globe (bulb)
- water bottle (at least 1L per person)
- whistle

CAMPING

- cooking, eating and drinking utensils
- dishwashing items
- matches and lighter
- sewing/repair kit
- sleeping bag and bag linner/inner sheet
- sleeping mat
- spare cord
- stove and fuel
- tent (pegs, poles and guy ropes)
- toiletries
- towel
- water-purifying tablets, iodine or filter

OPTIONAL ITEMS

- altimeter
- backpack cover (waterproof, slip-on)
- binoculars
- camera, spare film and batteries
- candle
- GPS receiver
- groundsheet
- notebook and pen
- swimming costume
- trekking poles
- watch
- umbrella (for women, use as a screen for toilet stops)
- plastic bags (for carrying rubbish)
- holdall (carryall or duffel bag)
- waterproof bags

topographical map. The receiver simply gives your position, which you must then locate on the local map. GPS receivers will only work properly in the open. The signals from a crucial satellite may be blocked (or bounce off rock or water) directly below high cliffs, near large bodies of water or in dense tree cover and give inaccurate readings. GPS receivers are more vulnerable to breakdowns (including dead batteries) than the humble magnetic compass – a low-tech device that has served navigators faithfully for centuries – so don't rely on them entirely.

Altimeter

Altimeters determine altitude by measuring air pressure. Because pressure is affected by temperature, altimeters are calibrated to take lower temperatures at higher altitudes into account. However, discrepancies can still occur, especially in unsettled weather, so it's wise to take a few precautions when using your altimeter.

BUYING TIPS

BACKPACK

On fully supported treks, a day pack will usually suffice, but if you are carrying your own gear you will need a backpack between 45L and 90L in capacity. Most trekkers in the Indian Himalaya will also need a holdall bag.

A good backpack should be made of strong fabric such as canvas or Cordura, a lightweight internal or external frame and an adjustable, well-padded harness that evenly distributes weight. Even if the manufacturer claims your pack is waterproof, use heavy-duty liners.

WATERPROOF JACKET

The ideal specifications are a breathable, waterproof fabric, a hood that is roomy enough to cover headwear but still allows peripheral vision, capacious map pocket, and a heavy-gauge zip protected by a storm flap.

TENT

A three-season tent will fulfil the requirements of most trekkers. The floor and the outer shell, or fly, should have taped or sealed seams and covered zips to stop leaks.

Most walkers/hikers/trekkers find tents of around 2kg to 3kg is a comfortable carrying weight. Dome- and tunnel-shaped tents handle windy conditions better than flat-sided tents.

OVERTROUSERS

Choose a model with slits for pocket access and long leg zips so that you can pull them on and off over your boots.

SLEEPING BAG & MAT

Down fillings are warmer than synthetic for the same weight and bulk but, unlike synthetic fillings, do not retain warmth when wet. Mummy bags are the best shape for weight and warmth. The given figure (-5ºC, for instance) is the coldest temperature at which a person should feel comfortable in the bag (although the ratings are notoriously unreliable).

An inner sheet helps keep your sleeping bag clean, as well as adding an insulating layer. Silk 'inners' are lightest, but they also come in cotton or polypropylene.

Self-inflating sleeping mats work like a thin air cushion between you and the ground; they also insulate from the cold. Foam mats are a low-cost, but less comfortable, alternative.

GAITERS

If you will be trekking through snow, deep mud or scratchy vegetation, gaiters will protect your legs and help keep your socks dry.

The best are made of strong fabric, with a robust zip protected by a flap, and secure easily around the foot.

FOOTWEAR

Runners or walking shoes are fine over easy terrain but, for more difficult trails and across rocks and scree, the ankle support offered by boots is invaluable. Nonslip soles (such as Vibram) provide the best grip.

Buy boots in warm conditions or go for a walk before trying them on, so that your feet can expand slightly, as they would on a walk.

Most trekkers carry a pair of sandals or thongs (flip flops) to wear at night or at rest stops.

SOCKS

The best trekking socks are made of a hard-wearing mix of wool (70% to 80%) and synthetic (20% to 30%), free of ridged seams in the wrong places. Socks with a high proportion of wool are more comfortable when worn for several successive days without washing.

- Reset your altimeter regularly at known elevations such as spot heights and passes. Do not take spot heights from villages where there may be a large difference in elevation from one end of the settlement to another.
- Use your altimeter in conjunction with other navigation techniques to fix your position. For instance, taking a back bearing to a known peak or river confluence, determining the general direction of the track and obtaining your elevation, will usually give you a pretty good fix on your position.

Altimeters are also barometers and are useful for indicating changing weather conditions. If the altimeter shows increasing elevation while you are not climbing, it means the air pressure is dropping and a low-pressure weather system may be approaching.

Route Finding

While accurate, our maps are not perfect. Inaccuracies in altitudes are commonly caused by air-temperature anomalies. Natural features such as river confluences and mountain peaks are in their true position, but sometimes the location of villages or trails is not always so. This may be because a village is spread over a hillside, or the size of the map does not allow for detail of the trail's twists and turns. However, by using several basic route-finding techniques, you will have few problems following our descriptions:

1. Be aware of whether the trail should be climbing or descending.
2. Check the north-point arrow on the map and determine the general direction of the trail.
3. Time your progress over a known distance and calculate the speed at which you travel in the given terrain. From then on, you can determine with reasonable accuracy how far you have travelled.
4. Watch the path – look for boot prints and other signs of previous passage.

EQUIPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Stoves & Fuel

As other fuels aren't generally available in India, purchasing a kerosene stove in India is the best option. Many of the kerosene stoves found in India's markets are both inexpensive (around Rs 500/US$12.50, depending on the size) and efficient. Remember to purchase spare parts and an ample supply of stove pins.

Before commencing the trek, check you know how to prime the stove and dismantle it. Also test how much kerosene you will need by timing how long it takes to cook a meal and measuring the amount of fuel that is burnt.

Cooking Items

For independent trekkers, pots and pans, enamel mugs, plates and cutlery (in fact all kitchen utensils) can be purchased in India. At most markets in the hill resorts, the price of pots and pans is determined by weight and should set you back Rs 200/US$5 to Rs 500/US$12.50. Cutlery and other cooking items, including metallic plates, bowls and mugs, can also be purchased in most locations.

If you have hired a cook, you can request they bring all the kitchen gear. It is also preferable to carry your own mug and cutlery during the day. This is particularly important if a trek member is sick, as it lets everyone in the group take responsibility for washing their own utensils.

Holdall

A strong duffel bag or holdall (carryall) is necessary for carrying your gear on the packhorses. This is preferable to bringing along an expensive rucksack that may end up in less than pristine condition after it has been tied on horses or yaks for 20 days. The holdall should be large enough to contain all your personal gear. Strong garbage bags are ideal for lining the bag. If you can afford it, a waterproof sailing bag is highly recommended.

For High-altitude Treks

For treks that traverse glaciers, trekkers must bring basic safety equipment. For other treks, particularly those going to high altitude during the early part of the season (when there is still significant snow), it is essential to bring the following gear, which is not readily available in India. A basic minimum includes the following:

- descenders
- harness
- ice axe
- karabiners

- rope (at least 40m long) for crossing glaciers and rivers

See also Acute Mountain Sickness (p232) for advice on staying healthy and treatment at high attitude.

For Independent Treks

Along with cooking items (p224), independent trekkers will need to supply the following:

- fuel containers; available in India
- kitbags for food supplies, cooking gear and carrying out non-biodegradable items; available in India
- mess tent for your porters or horse handlers; can be hired locally
- plastic jerry cans for carrying water; available in India
- stoves and fuel; bring a supply of spare parts
- tent; can be hired locally

Buying & Hiring Gear In india

Gear shops stocking lightweight clothing and equipment for hire can now be found in a number of towns in the Indian Himalaya including Leh, Manali and Rishikesh. However, the gear may not be as good or reliable as you are used to, and it may also be in short supply. Independent trekkers are advised to bring their own tent, sleeping bag, insulated mat and backpack.

For those doing an inclusive trek, professional agencies usually provide these items, although it is advisable to check exactly what is provided before you leave for India.

Health & Safety

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The chances of something going seriously amiss while trekking in the Indian Himalaya are small. With good preparation ensuring that you take a comprehensive medical kit and observing the need for good acclimatisation when at altitude, there is every chance that you will return fitter and more mentally energised than you have been for many years.

BEFORE YOU GO

Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, visit a physician at least six weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as 'the yellow booklet'), which will list all the vaccinations you've received. This is mandatory for countries that require proof of yellow-fever vaccination upon entry (sometimes required in India, see Required & Recommended Vaccinations, p228), but it's a good idea to carry a record of all your vaccinations wherever you travel.

Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

All the treks in this book are physically demanding and require at least a reasonable level of fitness. Even if you're tackling the easy or easy–moderate treks, you need to be relatively fit, rather than launch straight into them after months of fairly sedentary living. If you're aiming for the demanding treks, a good fitness level is essential.

Unless you're a regular walker, start your get-fit campaign at least three months before commencing your trek. Take a vigorous walk of about an hour, two or three times per week and gradually extend the duration of your outings as the departure date nears. If you plan to carry a full backpack on any walk, carry a loaded pack on some of your training jaunts.

It is recommended that you have a physical and dental examination before undertaking your trek. Anyone with long-term symptoms (such as indigestion, chest pain, wheezing or coughing, back or joint problems, recurrent infections, or dental problems) should have them thoroughly investigated before leaving home. All problems are exacerbated by altitude and strenuous exercise, and seem more serious in proportion to your distance from medical help.

INSURANCE

While most general travel insurances cover you against sickness while on a trek, not all cover you for emergency evacuation, which could run into many thousands of dollars if a helicopter is required. Remember that should evacuation be required some proof of insurance and of your ability to pay will save time, and perhaps even a life. Bear

FIRST-AID CHECKLIST

Following is a list of items you should consider including in your medical kit. Note that a wide range of medications is available for sale in India, most without need for a prescription. However, it is advisable to purchase certain items such as sunscreen and water-purification tablets before arriving in India. For more details of dosage and administration of these drugs, follow the instructions of the manufacturer or the doctor who prescribed them. In cases of known drug allergy, use the appropriate alternatives.

MANDATORY

- adhesive tape
- sticking plasters (Band-Aids, blister plasters)
- bandages and safety pins
- cotton wool
- elasticised support bandage for knees, ankles etc
- gauze swabs
- non-adhesive dressings
- small pair of scissors
- sterile alcohol wipes
- paper stitches
- sutures
- syringes and needles – in case you need an injection in countries with medical hygiene problems (ask your doctor for a note explaining why you have them)
- thermometer (note that mercury thermometers are prohibited by airlines)
- tweezers

MEDICATIONS

- antidiarrhoea and antinausea drugs
- antibiotics – consider including these if you're travelling well off the beaten track; see your doctor, as they must be prescribed, and carry the prescription with you
- antifungal cream or powder – for fungal skin infections and thrush
- antihistamines – for allergies, eg hay fever; to ease the itch from insect bites or stings; and to prevent motion sickness
- antiseptic (such as povidone-iodine) – for cuts and grazes
- calamine lotion, sting-relief spray or aloe vera – to ease irritation from sunburn and insect bites or stings
- cold and flu tablets, throat lozenges and nasal decongestant
- painkillers (eg aspirin or paracetamol or acetaminophen in the USA)
- AMS tablets – to assist in the prevention and treatment of mild mountain sickness

MISCELLANEOUS

- eye drops
- insect repellent
- multivitamins – consider for long trips, when dietary vitamin intake may be inadequate.
- rehydration mixture – to prevent dehydration, eg due to severe diarrhoea; particularly important when travelling with children
- sunscreen and lip balm
- water-purification tablets or iodine

in mind that most embassies in Delhi will authorise evacuation only after contacting your next of kin, which can take days.

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

To protect against various diseases in India, several immunisations are required. Plan ahead for your vaccinations; some require more than one injection, while some should not be given together. Vaccinations you should consider include:

Diphtheria & Tetanus

Vaccinations for these two diseases are usually combined and are recommended for everyone. After an initial course of three injections (usually given in childhood), boosters are necessary every 10 years.

Polio

Everyone should keep up to date with this vaccination, which is normally given in childhood. A booster every 10 years maintains immunity.

Hepatitis A
The vaccine for hepatitis A provides long-term immunity (possibly more than 10 years) after an initial injection and a booster at six to 12 months. Alternatively, an injection of gamma globulin can provide short-term protection against hepatitis A – two to six months, depending on the dose given. It is not a vaccine, but a ready-made antibody collected from blood donations. It is reasonably effective and, unlike the vaccine, it is protective immediately. However, because it is a blood product, there are concerns about its long-term safety.

Typhoid
Vaccination against typhoid is recommended if it's more than three years since your last one. It is now available either as an injection or as capsules to be taken orally.

Cholera
The current injectable vaccine is poorly protective and has many side effects, so it is not generally recommended for travellers.

Meningococcal Meningitis
Vaccination should be considered. A single injection gives good protection against the major epidemic forms of the disease for three years. Protection may be less effective in children under two years.

Hepatitis B
Risks in any country include receiving blood transfusions in areas where the blood may not be adequately screened; sexual contact; or needle sharing. Vaccination involves three injections, with a booster.

Rabies
Vaccination should be considered although it is highly unlikely that a trekker would come into contact with an infected animal. Pre-travel rabies vaccination involves having three injections over 21 to 28 days. If someone who has been vaccinated is bitten or scratched by an animal, they will require two booster injections of vaccine; those not vaccinated require more.

Malaria
Antimalarial drugs do not prevent you from being infected but kill the malaria parasites during their development and significantly reduce the risk of becoming very ill or dying. Expert advice on medication should be sought, as there are many factors to consider, including the area to be visited, the risk of exposure to malaria-carrying mosquitoes, the side effects of medication, your medical history and whether you are a child or an adult or pregnant. Travellers can get advice from a doctor, travel-health clinic or government health department.

INTERNET RESOURCES
There is a wealth of travel health advice to be found on the Internet. For further information, **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. The **WHO** (World Health Organization; www.who.int/ith) publishes a superb book called *International Travel and Health,* which is revised annually and is available online at no cost. Another website of general interest is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country and is updated daily.

It's usually a good idea to stay abreast of all current developments in this area and consult your government's travel-health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel)
Canada (www.travelhealth.gc.ca)
UK (www.dh.gov.uk/en/healthcare/healthadvicefortravellers)
USA (wwwn.cdc.gov/travel)

FURTHER READING
Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel Asia & India* is a handy, pocket-sized guide packed with useful information including pre-trip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information and what to do if you get sick on the road.

Also useful is *First Aid & Wilderness Medicine*, by Dr Jim Duff, a comprehensive pocket guide for the layperson. It describes many of the medical problems typically encountered while trekking.

The Mountain Traveller's Handbook, by Paul Deegan, includes chapters giving medical and safety advice as well as valuable information on all aspects of travelling in mountainous regions.

IN INDIA

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Doctors and associated medical staff at most hospitals in the towns in the India Himalaya provide a commendable level of care for a nominal fee. However, if an injury or sickness requires hospitalisation then consider an evacuation to one of the private hospitals in Delhi. The quality of service is internationally recognised with a similar level of charges.

Hospitals that have been recognised are the **Apollo Hospital** (☎ 011 2692 5858; Mathura Rd, Sarita Vihar) and the **East West Medical Centre** (☎ 011 2462 3738; B-28 Greater Kailash Part 1, Opposite N Block)

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Hepatitis

This is a general term for inflammation of the liver. It is a common disease worldwide. There are several different viruses that cause hepatitis, and they differ in the way that they are transmitted. The symptoms are similar in all forms of the illness, and include fever, chills, headache, fatigue, feelings of weakness and aches and pains, followed by loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, light-coloured faeces, jaundiced (yellow) skin and yellowing of the whites of the eyes. People who have had hepatitis should avoid alcohol for some time after the illness, as the liver needs time to recover. Hepatitis A is transmitted by contaminated food and drinking water. You should seek medical advice, but there is not much you can do apart from resting, drinking lots of fluids, eating lightly and doing your best to avoid fatty foods.

Japanese Encephalitis

Mosquitoes transmit this viral infection of the brain. Most cases occur in rural areas, as the virus exists in pigs and wading birds. Symptoms include fever, headache and alteration in consciousness. Hospitalisation is needed for correct diagnosis and treatment. There is a high mortality rate among those who have symptoms; of those who survive many are intellectually disabled.

Malaria

This serious and potentially fatal disease is spread by mosquito bites. It is extremely important to avoid mosquito bites and to take tablets to prevent this disease. Symptoms range from fever, chills and sweating, headache, diarrhoea and abdominal pains to a vague feeling of ill health. Seek medical help immediately if malaria is suspected. Without treatment, malaria can rapidly become more serious and can be fatal.

Meningitis

This is an infection of the brain's lining, which can occur in epidemics and is often fatal. Vaccination gives protection against some forms of the disease (Meningitis A and C). Symptoms are fever, a severe headache that is made worse if the knees are bent up to the chest, neck stiffness, nausea, vomiting and loss of consciousness. Treatment is ciprofloxacin, 500mg eight-hourly plus amoxicillin 500mg six-hourly.

Rabies

This fatal viral infection is not common in the Indian Himalaya. However, it is always sensible to avoid dogs, cats and monkeys, as their saliva may be infectious. Any bite, scratch or even lick from an animal should be cleaned immediately and thoroughly. Scrub with soap and running water, and then apply alcohol or iodine solution. If bitten or scratched, seek medical help promptly to receive a course of injections, which can prevent the onset of symptoms.

Tetanus

This disease is caused by a germ that lives in soil and in the faeces of horses and other animals. It enters the body via breaks in the skin. The first symptom may be discomfort in swallowing, or stiffening of the jaw and neck; this is followed by painful convulsions of the jaw and whole body. The disease can be fatal. It can be prevented by vaccination, so make sure you are up to date with this vaccination before you leave.

Tuberculosis

This is spread by droplet infection. It usually affects the lungs, producing a cough, often with bloodstained sputum, low fever and weight loss. It is a chronic disease – that is,

it develops slowly and can last a long time. A healthy person is less likely to contract it than someone who is run-down and debilitated. It is exceedingly unlikely that a trekker will contract TB, but it is not uncommon to come across villagers suffering from it. TB needs hospital diagnosis and long-term treatment.

DIARRHOEA

Simple things like a change of water, food or climate can all cause a mild bout of diarrhoea, but a few rushed toilet trips with no other symptoms is not indicative of a major problem. More serious diarrhoea is caused by infectious agents transmitted by faecal contamination of food or water, by using contaminated utensils, or directly from one person's hand to another. Paying particular attention to personal hygiene, drinking purified water and taking care of what you eat are important measures to avoid getting diarrhoea on your trek. See also Water (p236) and Food (p206).

Dehydration is the main danger with any diarrhoea, particularly in children or the elderly as dehydration can occur quite quickly. Under all circumstances fluid replacement (at least equal to the volume being lost) is the most important thing to remember. Weak black tea with a little sugar, soda water, or soft drinks allowed to go flat and diluted 50% with clean water are all good. With severe diarrhoea, a rehydrating solution is preferable to replace minerals and salts lost. Commercially available oral rehydration salts (ORS) are very useful; add them to boiled or bottled water. In an emergency you can make up a solution of six teaspoons of sugar and a half-teaspoon of salt to 1L of boiled or bottled water. You need to drink at least the same volume of fluid that you are losing in bowel movements and vomiting. Urine is the best guide to the adequacy of replacement – if you have small amounts of concentrated urine, you need to drink more. Keep drinking small amounts often. Stick to a bland diet as you recover.

Gut-paralysing drugs such as diphenoxylate or loperamide can be used to bring relief from the symptoms, although they do not actually cure the problem. Only use these drugs if you have no option but to continue with your trek.

Severe diarrhoea

Where diarrhoea is profuse and watery, contains blood or mucus, is accompanied by fever, or does not improve after 48 hours, antibiotics may be required. Gut-paralysing drugs should be avoided. In the absence of medical help the recommended drugs for bacterial diarrhoea (the most likely cause of severe diarrhoea in travellers) are norfloxacin 400mg twice daily for three days or ciprofloxacin 500mg twice daily for five days.

Amoebic dysentery

This is characterised by a gradual onset of low-grade diarrhoea, often with blood and mucus. Cramping abdominal pain and vomiting are less likely than in other types of diarrhoea, and fever may not be present. It will persist until treated and can recur and cause other health problems. If you think you have amoebic dysentery, you should seek medical advice; treatment is the same as for giardiasis.

Giardiasis

Symptoms include stomach cramps, nausea, a bloated stomach, watery, foul-smelling diarrhoea and frequent gas. Giardiasis can appear several weeks after you have been exposed to the parasite. The symptoms may disappear for a few days and then return; this can go on for several weeks.

HOW TO PREVENT MOSQUITO & MIDGE BITES

- wear light-coloured clothing
- wear long trousers and long-sleeved shirts
- use mosquito repellents containing the compound DEET on exposed areas (prolonged overuse of DEET may be harmful, especially to children, but its use is considered preferable to being bitten by disease-transmitting mosquitoes)
- avoid perfumes or aftershave
- use a mosquito net impregnated with mosquito repellent (permethrin) – it may be worth taking your own
- impregnating clothes with permethrin effectively deters mosquitoes and other insects

ACUTE MOUNTAIN SICKNESS

Lack of oxygen at high altitudes (over 2500m) affects most people to some extent. The effect may be mild or severe and occurs because the air pressure is reduced, and the heart and lungs must work harder to oxygenate the body. Symptoms of Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) usually develop during the first 24 hours at altitude but may be delayed up to three weeks.

Acclimatisation to altitudes above 3000m takes time. The body undergoes a number of physiological changes. Some are immediate, such as increased pulse and respiratory rate, while others, such as the increase in red blood cells or changes in the acid-base balance, take days or weeks.

MILD AMS

The above changes, plus the effects of intense sunlight, hard walking and dehydration, may cause any of the following mild acclimatisation symptoms:

- loss of appetite
- fatigue
- headache
- nausea
- dizziness
- sleeplessness
- mild shortness of breath on exercising
- interrupted breathing while asleep, followed by gasping (Cheyne-Stokes breathing)

SEVERE AMS

This is the accumulation of fluid (oedema) in the lungs and/or the brain. Fluid in the lungs is called high-altitude pulmonary oedema (HAPE). Fluid in the brain tissue is called high-altitude cerebral oedema (HACE). These may occur together or separately, rapidly or gradually over a period of days.

Night-time is a particularly dangerous period for people suffering AMS. Sleeping naturally lowers the respiratory rate, and Cheyne-Stokes periodic breathing can exacerbate the lowering of the oxygen level in the blood. Partners and attendants are often tired or asleep themselves, and a sudden worsening of the patient's condition may be missed. A typical pattern is for someone to go to bed with symptoms of mild AMS and to develop severe symptoms while asleep. Many people, including doctors, have woken to find their partners dead. Vigilance, especially at night, and the preparedness to take drastic action are essential to avoid death. An early warning sign of impending AMS is a resting pulse of more than 110 beats per minute (check in the morning and at night in bed).

To examine a person for AMS, take a good history and ask about the symptoms mentioned for mild AMS and, more specifically, severe AMS, as follows:

HAPE

Symptoms include any of those described for mild AMS, and:

- shortness of breath: which persists at rest (more than 12 to 14 breaths per minute)
- coughing: often with frothy, bloodstained sputum
- severe fatigue
- drowsiness
- pains in the chest or upper body

- wet sounds in the lungs on deep inspiration: place your ear on the bare skin of the patient's back below the shoulder blades and compare with a healthy person

SYMPTOMS OF HACE

Symptoms include any of the symptoms described for mild AMS, and:

- severe headache – which does not respond to mild painkillers; it is often aggravated by lying down
- nausea and vomiting: which may become pronounced and prolonged
- loss of coordination: inability to do the 'heel-to-toe' walking tests
- loss of mental abilities (eg memory, arithmetic)
- double, blurred or failing vision
- drowsiness
- severe fatigue

PREVENTION & TREATMENT

Treat mild symptoms by resting at the same altitude until recovery, usually a day or two. Paracetamol or aspirin can be taken for headaches. If symptoms persist or become worse, however, *immediate descent is necessary*; even 500m can help. Drug treatments should never be used to avoid descent or to enable further ascent.

The drugs acetazolamide (Diamox) and dexamethasone are recommended by some doctors for the prevention of AMS; however, their use is controversial. They can reduce the symptoms, but they may also mask warning signs; severe and fatal AMS has occurred in people taking these drugs. In general we do not recommend them for travellers.

To prevent acute mountain sickness – ascend slowly – have frequent rest days, spending two to three nights at each rise of 1000m. If you reach a high altitude by trekking, acclimatisation takes place gradually and you are less likely to be affected than if you fly directly to high altitude.

- It is always wise to sleep at a lower altitude than the greatest height reached during the day if possible. Also, once above 3000m, care should be taken not to increase the sleeping altitude by more than 300m per day.
- Drink extra fluids. The mountain air is dry and cold and moisture is lost as you breathe.
- Evaporation of sweat may occur unnoticed and result in dehydration.
- Eat light, high-carbohydrate meals for more energy.
- Avoid alcohol as it may increase the risk of dehydration.
- Avoid sedatives.

Portable pressure chambers have revolutionised the management of AMS. More and more trekking groups and mountaineering parties carry one. The victim is placed in the bag, which is continuously pressurised by a foot pump. It appears that sessions in the bag reverse the symptoms of mild AMS, while severe AMS victims can be resuscitated prior to evacuation. A major limitation in their use is claustrophobia, while damage to eardrums is a possibility. Their major application is in plateau situations.

Oxygen, if available, should be given at the rate of 2L to 6L per minute, depending on the patient's condition. Once again, the only guaranteed treatment is early and adequate descent.

In the absence of medical help, tinidazole or metronidazole are the recommended drugs. Treatment is a 2g single dose of tinidazole, or 250mg of metronidazole three times daily for five to 10 days.

COMMON AILMENTS

Blisters

To avoid blisters make sure your walking boots or shoes are well worn in before you hit the trail. Your boots should fit comfortably with enough room to move your toes; boots that are too big or too small will cause blisters. Similarly for socks – be sure they fit properly and are specifically made for walkers; even then, check to make sure that there are no seams across the widest part of your foot. Wet and muddy socks can also cause blisters, so always pack a spare pair of socks. Keep your toenails clipped but not too short. If you do feel a blister coming on, treat it sooner rather then later. Apply a simple sticking plaster, or preferably one of the special blister plasters that act as a second skin.

Cuts & Scratches

Even small cuts and grazes should be washed well and treated with an antiseptic such as povidone-iodine. Dry wounds heal more quickly, so where possible avoid dressings, which can keep wounds wet. Infection in a wound is indicated by the skin margins becoming red, painful and swollen. More serious infection can cause swelling of the whole limb and of the lymph glands. The patient may develop a fever, and will need medical attention.

Fatigue

A simple statistic: more injuries happen towards the end of the day than earlier, when you're fresher. Although tiredness can simply be a nuisance on an easy walk, it can be life-threatening on narrow exposed ridges or in bad weather. You should never set out on a walk that is beyond your capabilities on the day. If you feel below par, have a day off or take a bus. To reduce the risk, don't push yourself too hard – take rests every hour or two and build in a good half-hour lunch break. Towards the end of the day, take down the pace and increase your concentration. You should also eat properly throughout the day; nuts, dried fruit and chocolate are all good energy-giving snack foods.

Knee Strain

Many walkers feel the judder on long steep descents. Although you can't eliminate strain on the knee joints when dropping steeply, you can reduce it by taking shorter steps, which leave your legs slightly bent and ensure that your heel hits the ground before the rest of your foot. Some walkers find that tubular bandages help, while others use hi-tech, strap-on supports. Walking poles are very effective in taking some of the weight off the knees.

Sprains

Ankle and knee sprains are common injuries among trekkers, particularly when crossing rugged terrain. To help prevent ankle sprains, wear boots that have adequate ankle support. If you do suffer a sprain, immobilise the joint with a firm bandage, and, if feasible, immerse the foot in cold water. Distribute the contents of your pack among your companions. Once you reach shelter, relieve pain and swelling by keeping the joint elevated for the first 24 hours and, where possible, by putting ice on the swollen joint. Take simple painkillers to ease the discomfort. If the sprain is mild, you may be able to continue your walk after a couple of days. For more severe sprains, seek medical attention, as an X-ray may be needed to find out whether a bone has been broken.

Sore Throat

Stop smoking (if a smoker), gargle warm salt water and use steam inhalations and antiseptic lozenges. If the problem is severe or persistent, use an appropriate antibiotic.

Bronchitis

The early morning chorus of coughing is mostly chronic bronchitis. This infection of the respiratory tubes is marked by a cough that is especially productive early in the morning, when large amounts of phlegm may be expectorated. Treatment is with steam inhalations and antibiotics. It's also important to try to stay as warm as possible during recovery and to avoid unnecessary strenuous activity if you can.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Hypothermia

This occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it and the core temperature of the body falls.

It is frighteningly easy to progress from very cold to dangerously cold due to a combination of wind, wet clothing, fatigue and hunger, even if the air temperature is above freezing. If the weather deteriorates, put on extra layers of warm clothing: a windproof and/or waterproof jacket, plus wool or fleece hat and gloves are all essential. Have something energy-giving to eat and ensure that everyone in your group is fit, feeling well and alert.

Symptoms of hypothermia are exhaustion, numb skin (particularly toes and fingers), shivering, slurred speech, irrational or violent behaviour, lethargy, stumbling, dizzy spells, muscle cramps and violent bursts of energy. Irrationality may take the form of sufferers claiming they are warm and trying to take off their clothes.

To treat mild hypothermia, first get the person out of the wind and/or rain, remove their clothing if it's wet and replace it with dry, warm clothing. Give them hot liquids (not alcohol) and some high-energy, easily digestible food. Do not rub victims: instead, allow them to slowly warm themselves. This should be enough to treat the early stages of hypothermia. The early recognition and treatment of mild hypothermia is the only way to prevent severe hypothermia, which is a critical condition.

Frostbite

This refers to the freezing of extremities, including fingers, toes and nose. Signs and symptoms of frostbite include a whitish or waxy cast to the skin, or even crystals on the surface, plus itching, numbness and pain. Warm the affected areas by immersion in warm (not hot) water or with blankets or clothes, only until the skin becomes flushed. Frostbitten parts should not be rubbed. Pain and swelling are inevitable. Blisters should not be broken. Get medical attention right away.

Dehydration & Heat Exhaustion

Dehydration is a potentially dangerous and generally preventable condition caused by excessive fluid loss. Sweating, combined with inadequate fluid intake, is one of the commonest causes in trekkers, but other important causes are diarrhoea, vomiting, and high fever – see Diarrhoea (p231) for more details about appropriate treatment in these circumstances.

The first symptoms are weakness, thirst and passing small amounts of very concentrated urine. This may progress to drowsiness, dizziness or fainting on standing up, and finally, coma.

It's easy to forget how much fluid you are losing via perspiration while you are trekking, particularly if a strong breeze is drying your skin quickly. You should always maintain a good fluid intake – a minimum of 3L a day is recommended.

Dehydration and salt deficiency can cause heat exhaustion. Salt deficiency is characterised by fatigue, lethargy, headaches, giddiness and muscle cramps; salt tablets are overkill, just adding extra salt to your food is probably sufficient.

Heatstroke

This is a serious, occasionally fatal, condition that occurs if the body's heat-regulating mechanism breaks down and the body temperature rises to dangerous levels. Long, continuous periods of exposure to high temperatures and insufficient fluids can leave you vulnerable to heatstroke.

The symptoms are feeling unwell, not sweating very much (or at all) and a high body temperature (39°C to 41°C or 102°F to 106°F). Where sweating has ceased, the skin becomes flushed and red. Severe, throbbing headaches and lack of coordination will also occur, and the sufferer may be confused or aggressive. Eventually the victim will become delirious or convulse. Hospitalisation is essential, but in the interim get victims out of the sun, remove their clothing, cover them with a wet sheet or towel and then fan continually. Give fluids if they are conscious.

Snow Blindness

This is a temporary painful condition resulting from sunburn of the surface of the eye (cornea). It usually occurs when someone walks on snow or in bright sunshine without sunglasses. Treatment is to relieve the pain – cold cloths on closed eyelids

may help. Antibiotic and anaesthetic eye drops are not necessary. The condition usually resolves itself within a few days and there are no long-term consequences.

Sun

Protection against the sun should always be taken seriously. Particularly in the rarefied air and deceptive coolness of the mountains, sunburn occurs rapidly. Slap on the sunscreen and a barrier cream for your nose and lips, wear a broad-brimmed hat and protect your eyes with good quality sunglasses with UV lenses, particularly when walking near water, sand or snow. If, despite these precautions, you get yourself burnt, Calamine lotion, aloe vera or other commercial sunburn relief preparations will soothe.

Water

The adage, Don't drink the water when travelling in India, is just as relevant while trekking. Many diseases are carried in water in the form of bacteria, protozoa, viruses, worms and insect eggs etc. The number-one rule is be careful of the water and especially ice. Boiling the water taken from a stream is the best option as there are environmental problems with disposing of plastic containers of bottled water or soft drinks that are available from teashops on the trail. Tea or coffee should be OK, since the water should have been boiled.

Bites & Stings

LEECHES

Often present in damp rainforest conditions, leeches attach themselves to your skin to suck your blood. Trekkers often get them on their legs or in their boots. Salt or a lighted cigarette end will make them fall off. Do not pull them off, as the bite is then more likely to become infected. Clean and apply pressure if the point of attachment is bleeding. An insect repellent may keep them away.

SNAKES

To minimise your chances of being bitten always wear boots, socks and long trousers when walking through undergrowth where snakes may be present. Don't put your hands into holes and crevices. If bitten, immediately wrap the bitten limb tightly, as you would for a sprained ankle, and then attach a splint to immobilise it. Keep the victim still and seek medical help; it will help if you can describe the offending reptile. Tourniquets and previously recommended treatments such as sucking out the poison are now comprehensively discredited.

BEDBUGS

These live in various places, but particularly in dirty mattresses and bedding, evidenced by spots of blood on bedclothes or on the wall. Bedbugs leave itchy bites in neat rows. Calamine lotion or a sting-relief spray may help.

WATER PURIFICATION

The simplest way of purifying water is to boil it thoroughly. Vigorous boiling should be satisfactory; however, at high altitude water boils at a lower temperature, so germs are less likely to be killed. Boil it between five and 10 minutes when camping at altitude.

You can also use a chemical agent to purify water. Chlorine and iodine are usually used, available from outdoor-equipment suppliers and pharmacies. Chlorine tablets will kill many pathogens, but not some parasites like giardia and amoebic cysts. Iodine is more effective in purifying water. Follow the directions carefully and remember that too much iodine can be harmful.

Consider purchasing a water filter. There are two main kinds of filter. Total filters take out all parasites, bacteria and viruses and make water safe to drink. They are relatively expensive, but they can be more cost effective (and environmentally friendly) than buying bottled water. Simple filters (which can be a nylon mesh bag) take out dirt and larger foreign bodies from the water so that chemical solutions work much more effectively; if the water is dirty, chemical solutions may not work at all. It's very important when buying a filter to read the specifications, so that you know exactly what it removes from the water.

TRAUMATIC INJURIES

Detailed first-aid instruction is outside the scope of this book, but here are some tips and advice. Trekkers should consider taking a first-aid course to ensure they know what to do in the event of an injury.

Fractures

Indications of a fracture (broken bone) are pain (tenderness of the affected area), swelling and discoloration, loss of function or deformity of a limb. Unless you know what you are doing, you shouldn't try to straighten an obviously displaced broken bone. To protect from further injury, immobilise a non-displaced fracture by splinting it, usually in the postion found, which will probably be the most comfortable position.

Fractures of the thigh bone require urgent treatment as they involve massive blood loss and pain. Seek help and treat the patient for shock. Fractures associated with open wounds (compound fractures) also require more urgent treatment than simple fractures, as there is a risk of infection. Dislocations, where the bone has come out of the joint, are very painful, and should be set as soon as possible.

Broken ribs are painful but usually heal by themselves and do not need splinting. If breathing difficulties occur, or the person coughs up blood, medical attention should be sought urgently, as it may indicate a punctured lung.

Internal Injuries

These are more difficult to detect, and cannot usually be treated in the field. Watch for shock, which is a specific medical condition associated with a failure to maintain circulating blood volume. Signs include a rapid pulse and cold, clammy extremities. A person in shock requires urgent medical attention.

Major Accidents

Falling or having something fall on you, resulting in head injuries or fractures, is always possible when trekking, especially if you are crossing steep slopes or unstable terrain. The following is some basic advice on what you may be able to do in the event of a major fall:

- make sure you and other people with you are not in danger
- assess the injured person's condition
- stabilise any injuries, such as bleeding wounds or broken bones
- seek medical attention

If the person is unconscious, immediately check whether they are breathing – clear their airway if it is blocked – and check whether they have a pulse – feel the side of the neck rather than the wrist. If they are not breathing but have a pulse, you should start mouth-to-mouth resuscitation immediately. In these circumstances it is best to move the person as little as possible in case their neck or back is broken.

Check for wounds and broken bones; ask the person where they have pain if they are conscious, otherwise gently inspect them all over (including their back and the back of the head), moving them as little as possible. Control any bleeding by applying firm pressure to the wound. Bleeding from the nose or ear may indicate a fractured skull. Don't give the person anything by mouth, especially if they are unconscious.

You'll have to manage the person for shock. Raise their legs above heart level (unless their legs are fractured); dress any wounds and immobilise any fractures; loosen tight clothing; keep the person warm by covering them with a blanket or other dry clothing; insulate them from the ground if possible, but don't heat them.

Some general points to consider:

- Simple fractures take several weeks to heal, so they don't need fixing straight away, but they should be immobilised to protect them from further injury. Compound fractures need urgent treatment.
- If you do have to splint a broken bone, remember to check regularly that the splint is not cutting off the circulation to the hand or foot.
- Most cases of brief unconsciousness are not associated with any serious internal injury to the brain, but as a general rule of thumb in these circumstances, any person who has been knocked unconscious should be watched for deterioration. If they do deteriorate, seek medical attention straight away.

SAFETY ON THE TREK

A trek in the Himalaya can be a most exhilarating and fulfilling experience, and for many it is a wonderful introduction to one of the world's finest mountain regions. However, as with all outdoor activities, a trek should not be taken lightly and you should be well prepared before leaving the trailhead.

If trekking independently in a wilderness situation, do not trek with fewer than three members. This will ensure that if there is an accident, one member can remain with the injured party while the other goes to seek help. If you become separated from the group and lose the trail – do not panic. Do not attempt to take shortcuts or continue further into a wilderness area as that is likely to lead you into further problems. If you encounter inclement weather, do not continue. Wait until the weather clears before crossing high passes or swollen rivers and if at all uncertain retrace your tracks.

WALK SAFETY – BASIC RULES

Allow plenty of time to accomplish a walk before dark, particularly when daylight hours are shorter.

Study the route carefully before setting out, noting the possible escape routes and the point of no return (where it's quicker to continue than to turn back). Monitor your progress during the day against the time estimated for the walk, and keep an eye on the weather.

It's wise not to walk alone. Always leave details of your intended route, number of people in your group, and expected return time with someone responsible before you set off; let that person know when you return.

Before setting off, make sure you have a relevant map, compass, whistle, and that you know the weather forecast for the area for the next 24 hours.

ANIMAL ATTACKS

While encounters between trekkers and wild animals are rare, it is worth noting that many hundreds of villagers are attacked by bears each season. When moving through a forest region, particularly in the early evening, it is worth making some noise so as not to startle any wild animal in the vicinity. If you should encounter a bear do not turn and run. Instead, stop, make no movement and back off slowly. In most cases the bear will move away from you. Generally they will only charge if they feel endangered or trapped. If an encounter is imminent, drop into a foetal position and cover your neck in order to minimise the chances of serious injury.

The author has encountered both black and brown bears at close quarters (well, reasonably close) without incident. They, like most wild animals, will not attack unless they feel threatened.

Yaks are temperamental and it is wise not to move too close to a herd grazing on the high pastures in Ladakh. Buffalo, too, should be avoided. They are nervous of your scent (unless you are with a Gujar shepherd), although there is little chance that they would actually attack.

CROSSING RIVERS

The first rule of crossing rivers in the Himalaya is do not remove your boots. These can provide invaluable ankle support as the boulders on the riverbed are continually moving and can easily crush a foot or ankle.

Before crossing, look for areas where the river is braided and test the depth of the deeper water by throwing a rock in it. If you are carrying a large backpack, ease one arm out of the pack and unclip the buckle of the waist strap. In this way, should you lose your balance and be swept downstream, it's easier to slip out of your backpack instead of being dragged under. As you move off it is advisable to link arms (don't hold hands), face slightly downstream and cross the river diagonally moving gradually with the current.

Do not attempt a crossing if the water level is above thigh height. If crossing a glacially fed river wait till the morning when

the water level has dropped. Neither should you rely on blind faith by jumping from boulder to boulder. While many local people adopt this, they are more sure-footed than you, and should you slip there is often no comeback.

DOGS

When approaching a village or shepherd encampment, try to alert someone's attention to your presence so that the dogs can be chained up. If you are attacked outside of the village or encampment, ward off the dog with your stick or walking pole, or try to grab a small rock. A well-aimed rock will at least temporarily frighten off the dog and give you time to proceed safely.

LIGHTNING

If a storm brews, avoid exposed areas. Lightning has a penchant for crests, lone trees, small depressions, gullies, caves and cabin entrances, as well as wet ground. If you are caught out in the open, try to curl up as tightly as possible with your feet together and keep a layer of insulation between you and the ground. Place metal objects such as metal-frame backpacks and walking poles away from you.

ROCKFALL

While many trekkers will witness major rock avalanches from a distance, many injuries (sometimes fatal) are sustained each season from minor rock falls. Some situations in which accidents commonly occur are described below.

When trekking up a stone-laden gully, you should not attempt to ascend while anyone is directly above you. If a small rock or boulder is dislodged it can have dire results.

The second situation to avoid is one where goats and sheep are grazing above the trail. Be aware that the animals are forever dislodging small rocks and stones. Once their velocity increases they can cause severe injury.

Finally, take care if trekking in an area that is prone to rock falls or landslides. Watch out for any continuous series of falling pebbles or stones. This is particularly relevant during or after heavy rainfall when crossing extensive scree slopes.

GLACIAL CROSSINGS

Treat all glacial passes with respect. If you do not have the technical expertise you can still safely cross a glacier, but only in the company of a trained and well-equipped guide.

Each season there are instances of trekkers and local people falling into crevasses with tragic consequences. Walking across glaciers requires the use of ropes, ascenders, crampons and ice axes – essential gear for any trekking party. Ensure that the guide knows the terrain and that no group members wander at will during the crossing.

FLASH FLOODS

It is never advisable to camp close to the confluence of two streams or close to a river course. If there is a flash flood, within a short time a stream will turn into a torrent, which will dislodge boulders and unconsolidated terrain further up the valley.

RESCUE & EVACUATION

Organising the evacuation of an injured person requires that you first ascertain the severity of the injury and how the patient is to be evacuated. This can vary considerably.

If someone in your group is injured or falls ill and can't move, leave at least one person with the victim while the others go for help.

If the victim is not in dire straits, it is best to organise for a riding horse or porters to carry the victim as quickly as possible to the nearest trailhead.

This may not be as daunting as it seems, as on many extended treks a shortcut to the trailhead can often be completed in a day or two. Send someone reliable ahead to organise onward transport and medical arrangements.

Emergency Communications

Some trekking companies take satellite phones with them, as on most treks mobile (cell) phones have limited or no reception.

Search & Rescue Organisations

If you should go missing in the mountains, the state tourist authorities or the police may alert the Indian Army or the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). However, there is a limit to what they can do and the resources they have at their disposal. The police may also mount a search and rescue

operation. However, this will take time and will not usually be undertaken without instructions from the relevant authorities.

Helicopter Rescue & Evacuation

If the evacuation requires a helicopter you will need to contact the nearest police or army post, which will pass on your message by radio. Ensure that comprehensive details are conveyed, including the patient's medical condition, their full name, nationality, passport number, age and sex.

Indicate the degree of urgency (eg most immediate, victim in danger of dying). Give a detailed description of the location of the victim, draw a map or send a marked map, and indicate the altitude. If you intend to move, clearly indicate your evacuation route.

If a helicopter arrives, there are a couple of conventions you should be familiar with. Standing face on to the chopper:

- Arms up in the shape of a letter 'V' means 'I/We need help'
- Arms in a straight diagonal line (like one line of a letter X) means 'All OK'

For the helicopter to land, there must be a cleared space of 25m x 25m, with a flat landing pad area of 6m x 6m. The helicopter will fly into the wind when landing. In cases of extreme emergency, where no landing area is available, a person or harness might be lowered. Take extreme care to avoid the rotors when approaching a landed helicopter.

In most cases the Indian Army will not send a helicopter unless guaranteed payment. The victim's embassy will need to be contacted. Many embassies will not authorise an immediate evacuation, irrespective of the circumstances, until they are satisfied that the victim is insured or that the next of kin is prepared to foot the bill. This process can take many hours, even days.

Helicopter evacuation is expensive, ranging upwards from US$3000.

Most companies offer insurance to cover emergency evacuation that also includes trekking within the normal range of tourist activities. This insurance must be purchased before arriving in India.

Language

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In Darjeeling, Sikkim and in most parts of Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh, Hindi is widely understood. The people in the outlying villages of the Kashmir Valley speak only Kashmiri. Lonely Planet's *India* phrasebook contains a Kashmiri section, amongst others. Similarly Ladakhi, a Tibetan language, is the only language understood in the more remote valleys of Ladakh and Zanskar (see the Ladakhi section, p245). In Himachal and Uttaranchal, Pahari and Garwhali respectively are widely used in the village areas.

HINDI

Hindi is written from left to right in Devanagari script. While the script may be unfamiliar, many of the grammatical features will be familiar to English speakers.

For a far more comprehensive guide to Hindi get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Hindi, Urdu & Bengali* phrasebook.

PRONUNCIATION

Most of the sounds in Hindi correspond to the English pronunciation of the letters used to represent them in the transliteration.

Vowels

It's important to pay attention to the pronunciation of vowels and especially to their length. A line over a vowel (eg **ā**, **ī**, **ū**) indicates a longer vowel sound. The symbol **~** over a vowel (eg **ã̄**, **ĩ̄**, **ũ̄**, **ũ̄**) indicates that it should be spoken through the nose.

a	as the 'u' in 'sun'
ā	as in 'father'
ai	as the 'a' in 'bad'; when followed by **ya**, as the 'i' in 'high'
au	as the 'aw' in 'saw'; when followed by **va**, as the 'ou' in 'ouch'
e	as in 'bet'
i	as in 'sit'
ī	as the 'ee' in 'feet'
u	as in 'put'
ū	as the 'oo' in 'fool'
o	as in 'both'

Consonants

Most consonants in our transliterations are pronounced as in English, with the following exceptions:

c	as the 'ch' in 'cheese'
ṭ	pronounced as 't' but with the tongue curled back towards the roof of the mouth
ḍ	pronounced as 'd' but with the tongue curled back towards the roof of the mouth
g	always as in 'gun', never as in 'age'
r	trilled
ṛ	an 'r' with the tongue placed near the roof of the mouth and flapped quickly down, touching the roof as it moves
q	as the 'k' in 'king', but pronounced further back in the throat
y	as in 'yak'
kh	similar to the 'ch' in Scottish 'loch'
gh	like the 'g' in 'go' but pronounced further back in the throat

Aspirated consonants are pronounced with a breath of air, represented by an **h** after the consonant (except for **sh**, pronounced as in 'ship', and **kh** and **gh**).

RESPONDING TO 'GIVE ME'

Unfortunately, the first greeting from many children in well-trekked areas is of the 'give me' variety, while older villagers will ask for medicine. It is useful to know the following words.

I have…	*mere pās…hai*
I don't have…	*mere pās…nahĩ hai*
chocolate	*cākleṭ*
money	*paisa*
medicine	*davā*

GREETINGS & CIVILITIES

The traditional greeting when meeting a Hindu is to hold your palms together and say *namaste.* The reply is the same. Muslims, on the other hand, use the greeting *salām alaikum* – literally, 'Peace be on you'. The reply is either the same or *valekum as salām,* meaning 'And also on you'.

With goodbyes, Hindus again say *namaste,* while the Muslims say *khudā hāfiz,* which means, literally, 'May God bless you'.

When addressing a stranger, particularly if the person is of some social standing, then the suffix *ji* is a very polite expression, almost like 'sir'. This term may also be used as 'yes' in reply to a question.

Excuse me/Sorry	*kshamā kījiye*
Please	*mehrbānī kar ke*
Thank you	*shukriyā/dhanyavād*
You're welcome	*koī bāt nahĩ*
How are you?	*āp kais(e/ī) hai?* (m/f)
Fine, and you?	*bas āp sunāiye*

ESSENTIALS

Yes	*jī hā*
No	*jī nahĩ*
Maybe	*shāyad*

Do you speak English?
kyā āp ko angrezī ātī hai?
Does anyone here speak English?
kyā kisī ko angrezī ātī hai?
Could you speak more slowly?
dhīre dhīre boliye
Please write it down
zarā likh dījiye
How do you say…in Hindi?
hindī mẽ…kaise kehte hai
I don't speak Hindi
mujhe hindī nahĩ ātī
I have a visa/permit
mer pās visā/parmeṭ hai
I understand
mai samjh(ā/ī) (m/f)
I don't understand
mai nahĩ samjh(ā/ī) (m/f)
How much is…?
…kā dām kyā hai?
Please show me
dikhāiye

A little	*thoṛā thoṛā*
I know	*mujhe patā hai*
I don't know	*mujhe patā nahĩ*
Where is…?	*…kahā hai?*
sir/madam	*jī*
male	*ādmī*
female	*aurat*

SMALL TALK

What's your name?
āp kā shubh nām kyā hai?
My name is…
merā nām…hai
Where are you from?
āp kahā [ke rehnevāle/kī rehnevālī] hai? (m/f)
I'm from…
mai…[kā rehnevālā/kī rehnevālī] hũ (m/f)
I'm a tourist/student
main paryaṭak/chātra hũ
Are you married?
kyā āp shādīshudā hai?
I'm…years old
main…sāl kākī hũ
Do you like…?
kyā āp ko…pasand hai?
I like…very much
mujhe…bahut pasand hai
I don't like…
mujhe…pasand nahĩ hai
Just a minute
ek minaṭ rukiye
It's all right/No problem
koī bāt nahĩ

GETTING AROUND

When is the…bus?	*…bas kab jāegī?*
first	*pehlī*
last	*ākhirī*
next	*aglī*

How do we get to…?
…kaise jāte hai?

What time does the…leave/ arrive?	*…kitne baje jāyegā/ pahucegā?* (m)
	…kitne baje jāyegi/ pahucegī? (f)
boat	*nāv* (f)
bus	*bas* (f)
plane	*havāī jahāz* (m)
train	*relgāṛī* (f)

I'd like a…ticket	*mujhe ek…ṭikaṭ cāhiye*
one-way	*ek-tarafā*
return	*do-tarafā*
1st class	*pratham shrēni*
2nd class	*dvitīy shrēni*

USEFUL WORDS

big	*baṛā*
cheap	*sastā*
clean	*sāf*
dirty	*gandā*
expensive	*mahēgā*
far	*dūr*
fast	*tez*
go	*jānā*
good	*acchā*
happy	*khush*
heavy	*bhārī*
here	*yahā̃*
hers	*uskā/uskī* (m/f)
his	*uskā/uskī* (m/f)
light (weight)	*halkā*
load	*bojh*
mine	*merā*
small	*choṭā*
that	*vo*
there	*vahā̃*
this/these	*ye*
tired	*thakān*
yours (pl, inf)	*tumhārā*

AROUND TOWN

Where's a/the…	*…kahā̃ hai?*
bank	*baink*
bus stop	*bas stāp*
chemist/ pharmacy	*davāī kī dukān*
post office	*ḍākkhānā*
shop	*dukān*
ticket office	*ṭikaṭghar*

How much is…?
…kā dām kyā hai?
Can I change money here?
kyā yahā̃ ḍālar badal jaa sakt(ā/ī) hū̃? (m/f)

EMERGENCIES – HINDI

Help!	*mada kījiye!*
Stop!	*ruko!*
Thief!	*cor!*
I'm lost	*maī rāstā bhūl gayā/ gayī hū̃* (f/m)

How do we get to…?
…kaise jāte hai?

ACCOMMODATION

bed	*palang*
caretaker	*caukidār*
hotel	*hoṭal*
lodgings	*kamrā*

Do you have any rooms available?
kyā koī kamrā khālī hai?
I'd like to share a dorm.
mai ḍorm mē ṭheharnā cāht(ā/ī) hū̃ (m/f)
May I see it?
kyā mai kamrā dekh sakt(ā/ī) hū̃ (m/f)
Is there any other room?
koī aur kamrā hai?
Where's the bathroom?
ghusalkhānā kahā̃ hai?
Is there (breakfast/hot water)?
(naashta/garam paani) hai?

I'd like a…	*mujhe…cāhiye*
single room	*singal kamrā*
double room	*ḍabal kamrā*
room with a bathroom	*ghusalkhānevālā kamrā*

How much for…?	*…kā kirāyā kitnā hai?*
one night	*ek din*
one week	*ek hafte*

How much is…?	*…kā kyā dām hai?*
Do you have a…?	*kyā āp ka pās…hai?*
bed	*bistar*
room	*kamrā*
blanket	*kambāl*

FOOD & DRINK

Do you have…?
kyā āp ke pās…hai?
I am hungry
mujhe bhūkh lagī hai
I am thirsty
mujhe pyās lagī hai

I like hot and spicy food
muje tīkhā khānā acchā lagtā hai
I don't like hot and spicy food
mujhe tīkhā khānā acchā nahĩ lagtā hai

bread	*roṭī*
chicken	*murgh*
curd (yoghurt)	*dahī*
eggs	*anḍe*
food	*khānā*
fruit	*phal*
lentils	*dāl*
potato	*ālū*
restaurant	*ḍhābā*
rice	*cāval*
sugar	*cīnī*
tea	*cāy*
vegetable	*sabzī/sāg*
water	*pānī*
boiled water	*ūblā pānī*
cold water	*ṭhanḍā pānī*

TIMES, DAYS & NUMBERS

What time is it?
kitne baje hai?/ṭāim kyā hai?
It's (ten) o'clock
(das) baje hai

day	*din*
night	*rāt*
morning	*saverā/subah*
evening	*shām*
today	*āj*
tomorrow/yesterday	*kal*
(meaning is made clear by context)	
day after tomorrow	*parsō*
now	*ab*
week	*hafte*
month	*mahīnā*
year	*sāl/baras*

1	*ek*
2	*do*
3	*tīn*
4	*cār*
5	*pāc*
6	*chai*
7	*sāt*
8	*āṭh*
9	*nau*
10	*das*
11	*gyārah*
12	*bara*
13	*terah*
14	*caudah*
15	*pandrah*
16	*solah*
17	*satrah*
18	*aṭṭhārah*
19	*unnīs*
20	*bīs*
21	*ikkīs*
22	*bāīs*
30	*tīs*
40	*cālīs*
50	*pacās*
60	*sāṭh*
70	*sattar*
80	*assī*
90	*nabbe/navve*
100	*sau*
1000	*hazār*

HEALTH

I need a doctor
mujhe ḍakṭar cāhiye
It hurts here
yahā̃n dard hai
I have sore knees
ghuṭnōmē dard hai
I have blisters
chāle hai
I'm allergic to penicillin
mujhe penisilan se elargī hai

FAMILY

Being invited into a family house is one of the delightful aspects of trekking the Himalayas.

Is this your…?	*kyā yeh āp kā/kī…hai?* (m/f)
daughter	*beṭī*
elder brother	*bhaiyā*
elder sister	*dīdī*
father	*pitājī*
friend	*dost*
mother	*mātājī*
sister	*behn*
son	*beṭā*

married	*shādīshudā*
unmarried	*avivāhit*

WALKING

Hiring Porters & Horsemen

You will have little or no need to negotiate for porters or horsemen using their own language; at the trailhead or in town there is bound to be someone who can assist with the arrangements. However, the following phrases may be useful:

Will you come with me?
āp mere sāth calēge?
How many horses do you have?
āp ke pās kitne ghoṛe hai?
I have to go to…
mujhe…jānā hai
What do you charge per day?
ek din ke paise lete hai?
Do I provide your food?
kyā āp kā khānā mujhe denā hogā?
What food do you need?
āp ko kyā khānā cāhiye?
What weight do you carry?
āp kitnā vajan uṭhāte hai?
What weight does your horse carry?
āp ghoṛe par kitnā yajan rakhte hai?

Clothing & Equipment

It is imperative to check with porters at the outset of the trek whether they have the right clothing and equipment.

Do you have (a)…?	*kyā āp kea pās…hai?*
boots	*jūte*
gloves	*dastāne*
jacket	*jaikaṭ*
kerosene	*kerosin*
knife	*chūrī*
stove	*iṣṭov*
sunglasses	*dhūp kā cashmā*
tent	*tambū*

On the Walk

When asking directions and times in remote villages, it's a mistake to ask a closed question, such as 'Does it take four hours to reach…?' The answer will invariably be in the affirmative as the local does not want to disappoint you with a negative reply. Likewise, locals will often shorten the time it takes to reach a particular camp. Most villagers or shepherds will have little conception of time. They often walk for a very long time each day, so an hour or two is not really important to them.

How far is…?
…kitnī dūr hai?
Which trail goes to…?
kon sā rāstā…ko jātā hai?

far	*dūr*
near	*nazdīk*
right	*dāhinā*
left	*bāyā*
north	*uttar*
south	*dakshin*
east	*pūrv*
west	*pashcim*
level	*samtal*
uphill	*caṛhāī*
downhill	*ḍhalān*

Weather

It's…	*āj…*
cloudy	*bādal chāye hue hai*
cold	*bahut ṭhanḍ hai*
hot	*bahut garmī hai*
stormy	*tūfān*
windy	*tez havā cal rahī hai*
rain	*bārish*
sunshine	*dhūp*

Features

bear	*bhālū*
big river	*baṛā nadī*
Buddhist monastery	*gompā*
goat	*bakrī*
Hindu temple	*mandir*
lake	*jhīl*
leopard	*bāgh*
monkey	*bandar*
mountain	*pahāṛ*
Muslim mosque	*masjid*
pass	*darrā*
peak	*coṭī*
river	*nadī*
road	*saṛak*
rock	*patthar*
sheep	*bheṛ*
spring	*cashmā*
village	*gāv*

LADAKHI

Ladakhi, a Tibetan language, is used by most people indigenous to Ladakh and Zanskar. Learning a little Ladakhi will add to your enjoyment and will earn you the respect of the local people. If travelling out of Leh or trekking where little English is understood, it is quite necessary. If you can only remember one word, make it the all-purpose *jule* (pronounced *joo*-lay), which means 'hello', 'goodbye', 'please' and 'thank you'.

SPELLING

Every guidebook, map and tourist brochure offers a different way of spelling a name.

For example, there is a famous *gompa* (or *gonpa* or *gomba*), meaning 'monastery', at Tikse (or Thikse, Thiksey or Tiksey). The basic rule is: if it sounds the same, it's the same place.

BASICS

yes	*kasa*
no	*man*
How much/many?	*tsam?*
I don't understand	*hamago*
good	*demo*
meat	*sha*
milk	*oma*
rice	*dras*
rupee	*kirmo*
sugar	*khara*
water	*chhu*

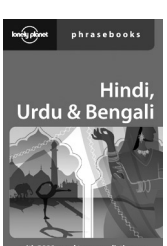
GEOGRAPHY & CLIMATE

In Ladakh, life is largely dominated by the weather and geography. Here are a few words that you may hear:

bridge	*zampa*
cold	*tangmo*
ice	*kang*
lake	*tso*
mountain	*ri*
mountain pass	*la*
river	*tsangpo*
snow	*ka*
stream	*tokpo*
summer	*yar*
wind	*lungspo*
winter	*guhn*

NUMBERS

1	*chig*
2	*nyis*
3	*sum*
4	*zhi*
5	*nga*
6	*truk*
7	*dun*
8	*gyet*
9	*gu*
10	*chu*



Also available from Lonely Planet:
Hindi, Urdu & Bengali and *India* phrasebooks

Glossary

A

alpine – all areas above the tree line
Aryans – a people who migrated from Persia and Asia Minor (Afghanistan and Central Asia) to northern India between 2500 and 1500 BC

B

Bakraval – goat herders from Jammu and Kashmir
basalt – hard, dense, volcanic rock; solidified lava
beggar – system of forced labour
Brahma – member of the Hindu trinity; referred to as the creator or the source of all existence
Buddha Jayanti – celebration of the Buddha's birth, death and enlightenment
bugyal – a high-alpine meadow in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand

C

cairn – pile or stack of rocks used to indicate the route or a trail junction
chai – brewed tea (a mixture of tea, milk and sugar boiled together)
cham – Buddhist masked dances
chang – barley beer brewed in Ladakh
chapati – local bread baked on a dry griddle
Char Dham – the popular pilgrimage to the four sources of the Ganges River
chola – woollen cloak worn by Gaddi shepherds in Himachal Pradesh
chomo – Buddhist nun
chorten – reliquary or shrine to the memory of a Buddhist saint; a conical stone monument, often containing relics and symbolising the natural elements
chowkidar – caretaker
chu – Ladakhi word for stream
cirque – rounded, high ridge or bowl formed by glacial action in mountainous regions

D

Dak bungalows – comfortable rest houses established by the British and still maintained in remote districts
Dalai Lama – spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists
Dalit – preferred name for India's Untouchable caste
dandy – a wooden platform or palanquin; used to carry pilgrims, supported by a team of porters
darshan – prayers
Devanagiri – script of Sanskrit-based language
Dhar– mountain range
dhaba – local tea stall or restaurant
dhal – a lentil-based soup or main dish
dhal bhat – dhal with rice
dhobi – washerman/woman
dhura – term for a pass in some regions of Uttarakhand
Diwali – one of the most important Hindu festivals, including the worship of Lakshmi
Dogras – rulers from the hill stations of Jammu who established the Jammu & Kashmir state
Drukpa – 17th-century Buddhist order supported by the royal families of Ladakh and Bhutan; the Red Hat sect
Dussehra – Hindu festival commemorating the Ramayana

F

foot – base of a mountain; lower end of a valley or lake
ford – to cross a river by wading
Forest Rest House – built to accommodate forest officers; trekkers may also stay here if there is a vacancy
fork – branch or tributary of a stream or river
4WD – Four-wheel-drive vehicle; jeep

G

gad – term for river in some regions of Uttarakhand
Gaddi – shepherds from Himachal Pradesh
Ganesh – elephant-headed god of wisdom and prosperity
Ganga – Ganges River; often used to name its tributaries, eg Gauri Ganga
garh – a fort in Uttarakhand
Garuda – the divine eagle, Vishnu's vehicle of transport throughout the universe

Gelukpa – followers of Tsongkhapa, often referred to as the Yellow Hat sect (now also referred to as the sect of the Dalai Lama)
Gita – sacred texts that set out the philosophical basis of reincarnation
glacier – extended mass of ice, formed from accumulating snow, that moves slowly down a mountain or valley
GMVN – Garhwal Mandal Vikas Niwas; in Uttaranchal, a state-owned organisation with a trekking division
gompa – Tibetan Buddhist monastery
GPS – Global Positioning System; a device that calculates position and elevation by reading signals from satellites
granite – coarse-grained, often grey, rock formed by the slow cooling of molten rock (magma) deep below the earth's surface
Gujar – shepherds who frequent many of the less remote valleys in Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand
gurdwara – Sikh temple
Gurkhas – military rulers from the Gorkha region of Nepal, who invaded the West Himalaya in the late 18th century

H

head – uppermost part of a valley
herbaceous – relating to plants or plant parts that are fleshy as opposed to woody
Holi – colourful Hindu festival to mark the end of winter
HPTDC – Himachal Pradesh Tourist Development Corporation

I

Id-ul-Zuhara – an important event in the Muslim calendar commemorating Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son
Indra – the Aryan god of the sky
Inner Line areas – areas close to India's borders (with China and Pakistan) that you need an Inner Line permit to enter
ITBP – Indo-Tibetan Border Police; a civilian police force charged with monitoring the border; requires trekkers to show their passports on treks near India's borders

J

J&K – Jammu and Kashmir State
Jumla – pre-Aryan god worshipped by the people from Malana village in Himachal Pradesh

K

Kali – goddess of destruction, one of the forms of the consort of Shiva
Kargyupa – one of the earlier Tibetan Buddhist schools, with its main centre at Rumtek gompa in Sikkim
karma – the path through the cycle of rebirths determined by cause and effect
Kantha – term for large alpine meadow in Garhwal
khal – term for a pass in Uttarakhand
Khampa – seminomadic Tibetan shepherds
kiang – wild horse
KMVN – Kumaon Mandal Vikas Niwas; in Uttarakhand, a state-owned organisation with a trekking division
kora – ritual walk around a sacred peak
kund – term for lake in Uttarakhand; also *tal*

L

la – Ladakhi or Tibetan term for a mountain pass or the God of the Pass
Lakshmi – consort of Vishnu and goddess of wealth
Lepchas – the original inhabitants of Sikkim
lingam – phallic symbol associated with Shiva

M

maharajah – (maha = big) therefore big king or ruler
mandir – Hindu temple
mani wall – dry stone wall with many of the upper stones carved with Buddhist prayers
Marpa – noted Buddhist sage who wandered the Himalaya in the 11th century
masjid – mosque; Muslim place of worship
Moghul – Muslim dynasty of Indian emperors
Momo – Tibetan steamed 'spring roll'
Mons – early Buddhist missionaries from India who travelled to Ladakh

N

Naga – benevolent half-snake, half-human being
Naropa – Buddhist sage who wandered the Himalaya in the 10th century
nirvana – the ultimate aim of Buddhist practice; release from both suffering and the cycle of existence
nullah – riverbed

P

Padmasambhava – Buddhist teacher who travelled the Himalaya in the 8th century
Pahari – hill people of Himachal Pradesh
paise – smallest unit of Indian currency; 100 paise make a rupee
Pandava – one of the key families in the Mahabharata
parao – local term for a trekking stage in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand
paratha – local bread cooked on an oiled griddle
puja – Hindu prayer session
pulao – savoury rice
puri – local bread, deep-fried
PWD – Public Works department

R

rajah – ruler or king
Rajput – Hindu warrior class; the royal rulers of Rajasthan
rakshi – rice wine
Rama – seventh incarnation of Vishnu
Ramadan – Muslim period of fasting, acknowledging the time when Mohammed had the Quran revealed to him in Mecca
Ramayana – the story of Rama and Sita (one of India's best-known legends)
rani – queen
Ringchen Brangpo – 11th-century Buddhist scholar said to have founded 108 gompas in the West Himalaya
rupee (Rs) – Indian unit of currency

S

sadhu – wandering Hindu holy person
Saka Dawa – Buddha's birth and enlightenment, celebrated in the Tibetan calendar
sar – Kashmiri term for lake
scree – weathered rock fragments at the foot of a cliff or on a hillside
Shia – Muslim followers of the son-in-law of the Prophet
Shiva – the Hindu destroyer and also the creator, worshipped in the form of the lingam
Sikhs – members of the religious body founded in the Punjab in the 16th century, which drew on both Hindu and Muslim traditions
snowmelt – accumulation of slow-melting packed snow
spring line – a place where the water comes straight out of the ground
subalpine – upper forest zone
sumdo – Ladakhi term for village
switchback – a zig-zag on a trail that follows a steep grade

T

tal – term for lake in Uttarakhand; also *kund*
terminal moraine – boulders and scree at the snout of a glacier
thangka – Buddhist religious painting
thach – alpine meadow in Himachal Pradesh
Thakur – titled rulers from Lahaul in Himachal Pradesh
tokpo – Ladakhi term for river
tongba – fermented millet mixed with boiling water, drunk in eastern Nepal and Sikkim
traverse – to cross a slope or ridge
tree line – uppermost (natural) level to which tree cover extends on a mountainside
true left – the left bank of a river or glacier when facing downstream or downvalley
true right – the right bank of a river or glacier when facing downstream or downvalley
tsampa – roasted ground barley, often mixed with butter tea and drunk by Ladakhi and Tibetan people
Tsongkhapa – Buddhist teacher who established a major reformist school of Buddhism that was adopted by the Dalai Lama

V

Vedas – ancient set of hymns devoted to the Aryan gods
Vishnu – the preserver and sustainer; member of the Hindu trinity, along with Shiva and Brahma

W

wallah – worker or doer, eg dhobi wallah (washerman)
walli – the female equivalent of a wallah
Wesak – Buddha's birth and enlightenment, celebrated in the Hindu calendar